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Deserving Princess—a story

Melanie Rae Thon
Iona Moon—a story

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Goethe in English

POEMS BY Herbert Lomas, Jane Brox, Philip Dacey, Neal Bowers

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REVIEWS BY Alice Bloom, C.B. Cox, Tom Wilhelmus, Sonya Rudikoff, Robert McDowell, Diane Middlebrook

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In leaps, like goats climbing the terraced hills;
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surrender another cache of livid shadow.
Cicadas transpose their note to a higher key.
As if the ear were the most material sense,
they sing us back to flesh and bone, the steep
rocky quarter acre where we happen to live.

But the eye is aethereal, that watches over
the tranquil cool Aegean, mantle of blue
woven east and west with the stitch of wind.
We see beyond our country into another,
familiar, never attained, where scattered islands
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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

VOLUME XLI NUMBER 3 AUTUMN 1988

ESSAYS

Northrop Frye and the Anatomy of Wit — BERT O. STATES — 457

Goethe in English — THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI — 499

FICTION

Iona Moon — MELANIE RAE THON — 433

Deserving Princess — JOHN HOLLOWAY — 449

POETRY

Chanson Triste; Other Life; First Kisses; Assisi and Back; In Spite of Everything; Suffolk Evenings — HERBERT LOMAS — 481

Thomas Eakins: The Secret Whitman Sitting — PHILIP DACEY — 489

Shapes and Shadows; Insomnia; Kitchen Secrets; Losing Paris — NEAL BOWERS — 493

Understanding the Time; Supper Time — JANE BROX — 497

CHRONICLES

Theatre — RICHARD HORNBY — 512

"M. Butterfly," "Macbeth," "Joe Turner's Come and Gone"

Film — BERT CARDULLO — 519

"Au revoir les enfants," "Wings of Desire"

Music — ROBERT S. CLARK — 527

The Met's new "Ring" cycle

Fiction I — ALICE BLOOM — 539

Fay Weldon, Iris Murdoch, Carolyn Chute, etc.

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Fiction II TOM WILHELMUS 548
Donald Barthelme, John Updike, Thomas Bernhard, etc.
Poetry ROBERT McDOWELL 565
Alan Wearne, Dick Allen, Allen Hoey, etc.

REVIEWS
Intellectuals and Professions SONYA RUDIKOFF 531
A look at the college reading lists controversy
Anyone for Tennyson? WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD 557
The letters, poems, and life of Victoria's Poet Laureate
Jung and the Freudians HARRY GOLDGAR 575
"Jung: A Biography," by Gerhard Wehr
The Life of a Good Old Girl DIANE MIDDLEBROOK 581
"Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance," by Ann Waldron
Hugh Kenner's Island C.B. COX 586
Hugh Kenner on modern English culture and literature

COMMENT
Transatlantic Soap GEORGE WATSON 422

THE BENNETT AWARD, 1988 417

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 592

TO OUR READERS

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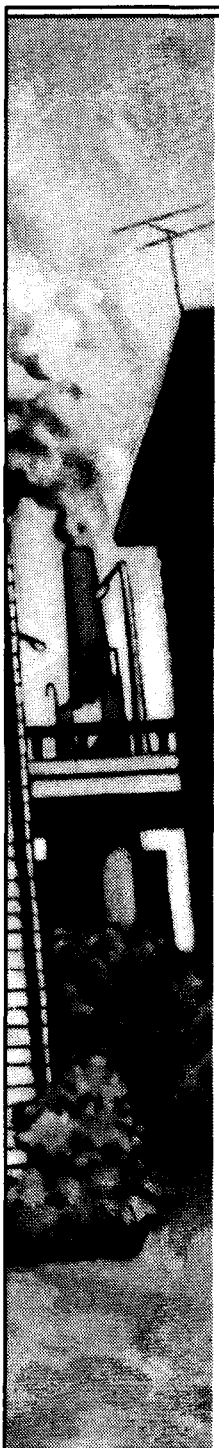

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Comment:

Transatlantic Soap

INTELLECTUALS CAN TURN GIGGLY at the mention of "Dallas" and "Dynasty." Or, if in solemn mood, they will talk of audience-response and Deep Underlying Social Patterns.

Weeks of watching TV during a visit to an American campus, on a two-month leave of absence from a British university, have persuaded me they are right to do both. Soap like "Dallas" and "Dynasty" really is funny, deliberately or otherwise, and we probably dismiss all too easily the hypothesis that it is meant to be. It also reflects an Anglo-American mood of our times—which is where the social patterns come in, deep-underlying or shallow. And nobody has to live in the United States to watch either series, or "Dynasty" 's offspring "The Colbys" either: British television puts out all of them. Soap has joined Shakespeare and the common law as part of the English-speaking heritage. But two months on an American campus have induced in me a reflective mood, as it was doubtless meant to do, making me eager to trade views on a literary form that few intelligent people on either side of the Atlantic can truthfully deny taking an interest in. It all begins to look rather like the Rise of the Novel in the eighteenth century, which similarly started with low prestige and a large following, mainly among women. The novel has long since turned into the most potently creative literary form of modern times, and there is already some evidence that the intelligent may pay more attention to soap—however sardonic an attention—than the generality of mankind.

Soap is Anglo-American in its origins, which belong to the 1930s. Simple as a term, "soap opera" is American: it emerged when soap manufacturers during the Depression were offered reduced rates for afternoon radio commercials beamed principally at housewives. The BBC, which has been sponsoring its own uncommercial brand at least since 1948, when its daily radio series "Mrs Dale's Diary" began, has never liked the expression, and (ever-conscious of its dignity) prefers officially to call it Continuing Drama. And continue it certainly does. "Mrs Dale" lasted on British radio for an impressive twenty-one years, down to 1969—so long, in fact, that the familiar tones of an English doctor's wife, played by the late Jessie Matthews, intoning the celebrated words "I'm worried about Tom," became a mocking household slogan. It was joined by "The Archers" a couple of years later, in 1950. "The Archers" still continues

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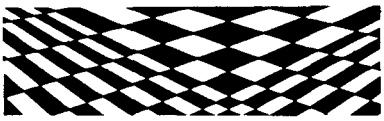

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on BBC radio, daily on weekdays, set in a slightly idyllic South Midlands farm and its surrounding rural community Ambridge; and it has already outstripped its town rival in longevity, by a dozen years and more. Just why a nation like Britain whose economy is only 5 percent agricultural should take a rural community so deeply to its heart is a question for sociologists to chew on; though a literary historian with a training in pastoralism would probably arrive at a better answer, and faster.

"The Archers" peaked early in its career, in 1955, when Grace Archer died dramatically in a fire. At that climactic moment in the life of Ambridge, some 20 million Britons, or about half the available nation of 56 million (if you omit tiny tots and those without access to a set) are said to have listened in, so that the mid-1950s may confidently be dubbed the Golden Age of radio soap—already under dire threat from its visual rival. TV was soon to reduce that listening figure to a mere three million, and it now stands modestly at around five. By 1960 the first highly successful TV soap was already on British screens: "Coronation Street," a low-life comedy played out in northern accents in a back street somewhere near Manchester.

It is not usually remembered, even in Britain, that the British were the first televisual nation, with programs broadcast as early as 1935. They ceased in 1939-40, with the war; and by the time they were revived, in the 1950s, they were running in tandem with American competitors. Compared with the dozen-or-so channels an American may now choose from, if he is lucky, the British viewer commonly has only four—two of them BBC, which still proudly broadcasts without commercials: the advertising ratio on the other two being strictly limited by legislation. The BBC is not a government station, though it has grown ruefully accustomed over the years to being supposed to be one, especially overseas: it is an independent corporation sustained by licence fees paid by households that possess one or more TV sets—the unrewarding task of collecting fees from radio owners having been abandoned years ago. Like the churches and pressure groups generally, government is admittedly one of the many sources of opinion the BBC is sensitively, even nervously, aware of. But the delicate issue of political bias, which arose sharply over the Falklands war of 1982, and again in 1985 over a TV documentary interviewing Ulster extremists, hardly affects the transmission of Continuing Drama, whether homegrown or American. The politics of soap is left to the analysts, psycho- or socio-, to explore.

"We reflect society," a BBC soap producer once remarked. "We must not try to lead it." That remark could have been sincerely made on either side of the Atlantic. By and large, soap takes its time to reflect the world we live in: problems of race only entered

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"Dynasty" in 1982-83, when Blake Carrington discovered he had a black half-sister; bisexuality at much the same time, when his happily married son Stephen started worrying about his sexual orientation. But there are larger issues than these at stake; and the new brand of American soap that arrived with "Dallas" in 1978 and (still more) with "Dynasty" three years later briskly reflected a new mood of conservative populism, I suggest, that also led to the Thatcher-Reagan victories of 1979-80.

The New Soap is multi-millionaire rich. It is radically different from the humdrum decency of Mrs. Dale and her doctor-husband, or from the no more than comfortably prosperous farmland Archers. There is nothing to be ashamed of, it proclaims, in creating or inheriting a commercial empire, or in living like Blake Carrington in a 48-room mansion with uniformed servants—seventeen, is it?—or in owning, like his wife Krystle, jewels you can sell for four million dollars to help your husband out of a tight corner in his business affairs.

The New Soap, what is more, is New Rich. It is centered not on old big-city establishments like New York or London, but on Texas, Colorado or (more recently, with "The Colbys") California. Its denizens might be said to affect a style of life rather than to have one, and their affectations can be strenuous: in fact the Carringtons dine in formal dress even when alone as man and wife, taking coffee after dinner from a silver pot served by their butler in a booklined study. They look pleased to have got there, perhaps even a little surprised, and often seem more natural around a swimming pool than in street clothes. They are rootless, and their origins are unexplained. Joan Collins' unrevised British accent, in her role as Blake's bitchy ex-wife Alexis, has never been accounted for in any instalment I was lucky enough to see, and hardly calls for much explanation: it contributes to the general air of unbelonging that pervades both "Dynasty" and "The Colbys," where the characters never seem to belong anywhere in particular, or to one another for long; and even their clothes can look designed only for one appearance. "That's a nice little nothing you're almost wearing," James Bond once remarked appreciatively when his girl changed for the evening; and the same could often be said of Miss Collins' wardrobe, which darts off in all directions from a girlish figure, as if to make a point about fashion unrelated to herself and entirely its own. And that point, of course, is that fashion costs money, and money makes its own rules. Old Soap like "The Archers" took unglamourous care over social and economic accuracy, by contrast, and to this day its office in BBC Birmingham has a chart of crops to ensure against agricultural errors, along with complete files on each character to prevent inconsistencies. Accuracy, not chic, was its boast and its forte. But then radio is far more supple in its use of actors than TV, and it can be more efficiently concerned with getting things

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right. In fact TV writers are sometimes forced into using a character simply because an actor happens to be available on a certain day; and they can face embarrassing dilemmas if, like the patriarch of "Dallas," an actor is taken sick or dies.

The new rich do not conceal their wealth. The women in "Dallas" and "Dynasty" walk around looking rich: the men look worried about something, perhaps the bills. The New Soap is rather like grand opera without the music, apart from a signature tune. It is frankly, exultantly heroic. Like the New Conservatism whose age of triumph in the eighties it chronicled, it is firmly about the glamour and the perils that great wealth can bring.

Which, of course, is a mighty good theme for any new fiction in an affluent age; and the only rational fear in the minds of millions is whether one can ever get enough of it. Even soap can let you down. When the "Dynasty" ratings faltered in the winter of 1984-85, its authors—Esther and Richard Shapiro—called a crisis meeting in their Beverly Hills office, with an agenda (it is rumored) headed "Lust, power, intrigue and other fine things." Exactly; and few of us, to be frank, get enough of any of them. Since then Miss Collins, perhaps the busiest woman on earth nowadays in front of a camera, has indulged in a mini-series uncompromisingly called "Sins." The trouble with intrigue, it was found, is that it can easily grow too involved for the viewers, not to mention the writers. "Miami Vice" looks good, but its fan mail complains of unintelligibility: at least the murder of J.R. in "Dallas" all those years ago was neatly plotted. By 1984 "Dynasty" was so over-involved with a deposed king of Moldavia, wherever that is, and a complex melodrama about two look-alike Krystles, one of them kidnapped, that it had almost forgotten lust or power or any fine things. Its sins were bland, its intrigues tedious; it had forgotten what intrigue is for. For all Alexis' gowns and Krystle's jewelry, it had lost track of the simple, innocent charm of money and what money can buy.

What money can buy is luxury, and the old adage about being miserable in comfort might have been made for the New Soap.

Money seldom makes its characters happy, or even leaves them much peace and quiet. But they *are* supposed to know how to furnish a room and make every one of forty-eight of them look grand and richly cosy. There is a sheer honest-to-goodness excess about the décor and the dresses in "Dallas" and "Dynasty" that is unremittingly determined to impress; and the cast, regardless of sex, look like gorgeous advertisements for shampoo and skin moisturizer. These are highly sexual beings. Even Miss Collins' wrinkles are exquisite; and Linda Evans' silver coiffure, as she plays either Krystle, is reported by some fashion experts to outmatch Diana Princess of Wales in hairline chic. The New Soap openly glorifies the possession of things. And yet the lofty moral charge of materialism, what-

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ever it amounts to, still does not seem to me to fit "Dallas," "Dynasty," or "The Colbys," and it needs to be explained why.

Who would want to be Blake, Krystle or Alexis, or any of their tortured and self-torturing offspring?

That is a rhetorical question. But if it has to be answered, the likeliest answer is that one would like their money without their problems. And the point of the New Soap—no trivial point—is that you cannot have the money without the problems. The message was familiar to the Fathers of the Early Church, who counselled abstinence and a trip to the desert; not to mention Pythagoras and Buddha before them. The World will disappoint, my son. Wealth, as all the great religions tell, is subject to decay. Investments fail, creditors foreclose, banks refuse multi-million overdrafts, and your wife (or seeming wife) may even be poisoning you for your fortune, while your ex-wife can be scheming to win possession of a home which, quite apart from the convenience of its 48 well-appointed rooms, has sentimental memories for yourself and your kin. You have grown accustomed to it.

So who wants to be a millionaire? The millionaires of "Dallas" and "Dynasty," at all events, are in the last analysis not all that much to be envied. They often seem busy running hard just to stay in the same place. Neither their marriages nor their affairs net them more than a passing pleasure, and there is always a crisis at the other end of the telephone or telex. In a word, viewers envy their homes and their jewelry, but not them. And that, surely, is not the simple message of materialism.

What, then, *is* the reassurance that the New Soap has offered for a decade to our virtuous and humdrum lives?

The message, perhaps, that the rich are not to be envied, after all, not to be reviled—and, in consequence, not to be pillaged. And all that arguably has its hidden political point, on either shore of the Atlantic. Reaganism-Thatcherism is not a dogma of settled forms or traditional institutions, after all, like the Old Conservatism it supplanted; and the New Right has shown scant respect for family lineage or wealth inherited rather than made. It is a doctrine of work, initiative-taking, money-skills and grabbing a fat chance when you see one. An upstart faith, in fact—notably unsnobbish, and at least faintly ruthless, within the bounds of prudence, about the threefold task of finding, getting and keeping.

The New Soap is the saga of that New Rich. It is also, in the age of the ballot, its defense—or perhaps it would like to be; and a recent puzzled report on the matter by a Dutch feminist, Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* (1985), though appropriately anxious about her own guilt-ridden addiction to transatlantic soap and desperately eager to score some sort of radical and anti-American point against it, sadly misses the radical points that can fairly be made.

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So let us make them. For one thing, "Dallas" and "Dynasty" are hymns in praise of the aging or the downright old, which surely signifies something to a Reaganite era. The old are wiser, and they know more. Miss Ellie in "Dallas," or Blake Carrington in "Dynasty," are grandparents who demand to be accepted as repositories of wisdom, nothing less. Just as the New Left of the 1960s was based on a cult of youth, so has its mirror-image in our own times, the New Right, paid generous and exaggerated tribute to the wisdom of experience. As someone remarks at the end of *King Lear*, the oldest hath borne most.

That is the nub of the New Soap, surely, and it is a nub that Ms. Ang unaccountably allows to pass unremarked. Several years ago, as she explains in her book, she placed an advertisement in a Dutch women's magazine called *Viva* inviting its readers to write in telling her what they liked about "Dallas." That, in potential, was a lot of people. Over half the population of the Netherlands, she reveals in an introduction, were watching it in the spring of 1982, at its peak—causing empty Dutch streets and a drop in water consumption during viewing time, presumably through abstention from baths and dishwashing. The book she wrote from that written response is perhaps better at stating the problem of addiction than at solving it. But then Ms. Ang has declared her purpose to be one of contributing to "further problematization," as if we did not have enough problems already; so like other sociologists before and after her, she may be professionally reluctant to record the obvious.

Another aspect Ang fails to interpret, or even mention, is that the American rich of today are surely the least ostentatious plutocracy in human history. The United States is said to be the world's eleventh wealthiest nation, at most, in terms of per capita income. But then since the top ten are mostly tiny in human terms, like Kuwait or Brunei, we may readily accept that the visible plutocracy of the late twentieth century, more or less anywhere in the world, is likely to be more or less North American. And that plutocracy is strikingly, uniquely modest in its public and even in its private behavior. It is content to wear casual rather than glamourous clothes, for all or most of the time, to take its coffee out of thick mugs rather than porcelain, and to inhabit homes which, though well plumbed and even luxurious, are built for comfort rather than style. (Paris and London look richer than New York, and aren't.) But the New Soap, by contrast, is unrealistically ostentatious. The Carringtons dress for dinner in "Dynasty," and their viewers will continue to demand that they do. That is not because the New Rich really behave like that, or because viewers imagine they do. It is because it makes it all better to watch. The New Soap is romance as well as realism; it is about a world at once real and imaginary, like all good fictions, where Wouldn't-it-be-wonderful-if counts for at least as much as the drab sobriety of the Way-that-things-are.

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And how better to justify an age of vulgar riches than to suggest that wealth punishes its victims even as it enriches them? Feeling that you have to dress for dinner even when alone with your wife is bad enough, but it is only a beginning; and the daily problems of the New Soap plutocracy are far, far worse than the tuxedo. They include financial ruin, kidnapping with torture, incest, bisexuality and attempted murder. All of which, especially if you are not New Rich yourself, may be seen as subtly and flatteringly consoling. The New Soap is ultimately soft soap. In fact there is a folk etymology for the term itself, more plausible and probably more widely believed than the true one, that associates it with just that: a sort of mass cultural emollient, its longer-term effects notoriously deadening to the spirit and soporific to any rebellious urge towards independent thought. There is even said to be a disease called Soap Fatigue, born (one imagines) of a dazed over-exposure to hours of elaborate plotting and over-stylish décor. The New Soap is emollient enough to soft-soap away all the problems you have, and complicated enough to make you forget them. It sends you to bed too tired to be discontented, and too preoccupied to be difficult. You accept your lot.

Or so, one imagines, someone out there must hope and think. And one cannot help wondering whether that someone is right.

GEORGE WATSON

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The Poetry Center
of the 92nd Street Y

Calendar of Readings, 1988-89: 50th Anniversary Season		Single Tickets*
October 10	**Saul Bellow,** Nobel Prize-winning American novelist	$12
17	**Joseph Brodsky,** Russian Nobel Laureate	$10
24	**Robert Stone** and **Ariel Dorfman**	$8
31	**Isaac Bashevis Singer**	$12
November 7	**Alain Robbe-Grillet,** Preeminent French novelist	$8
14	**George Konrád,** Hungarian novelist	$8
	ANTIPODES: Australian Literature Festival	
November 21	Critic **Robert Hughes;** poets **Les Murray** and **Chris Wallace-Crabbe**	$8
28	Fiction writers **Thomas Keneally** and **Thea Astley**	$8
December 5	Novelists **Shirley Hazzard** and **David Malouf**	$8
12	Fiction writers **Peter Carey, Rodney Hall** and **Elizabeth Jolley**	$8
December 11	**A T.S. Eliot Centenary Reading** with **Irene Worth** and **Christopher Plummer**	$12
20	**Amiri Baraka** and **Allen Ginsberg**	$8
January 9	**Tomas Tranströmer** and **Göran Sonnevi,** Swedish poets	$8
16	Actors **Ossie Davis** and **Ruby Dee** read **Countee Cullen** and **Langston Hughes**	$8
30	**Louise Glück** and **C.K. Williams,** American poets	$8
February 6	**An Evening of Grimms' Fairy Tales** with **Lore Segal** and **William Gass**	$8
13	**Anita Desai,** Indian novelist	$8
27	**Stanley Kunitz,** Pulitzer Prize-winning poet	$8
March 6	**William Kennedy**, author of *Ironweed*	$8
13	Actress **Ellen Burstyn** reads poems by **D.H. Lawrence**	$10
20	**Grace Paley** and **Allan Gurganus,** fiction writers	$8
27	**Maxine Kumin** and Israeli poet **Dahlia Ravikovitch**	$8
April 3	**Maxine Hong Kingston,** author of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*	$8
10	Brazilian novelist **Moacyr Scliar** and Portuguese novelist **José Saramago**	$8
17	**Manuel Puig,** Argentine novelist	$10
24	**Rita Dove** and **Stephen Sandy,** American poets	$8
May 1	**Günter Grass**	$10
8	**"Discovery"/*The Nation*** 1989 Poetry Contest Winners	$6
15	**FIRST VOICES: A Poetry Center 50th Anniversary Reading with Gwendolyn Brooks, Anthony Hecht, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, May Swenson, Richard Wilbur,** and others	$10
22	**Nadine Gordimer,** Renowned South African novelist	$10

**For complete information about The Poetry Center's workshops and reading series, please call (212) 427-6000, ext. 176 or 208. To charge tickets call Y-CHARGE at (212) 996-1100. The 92nd Street YM-YWHA is an agency of UJA Federation.*

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MELANIE RAE THON

Iona Moon

Willy Hamilton never did like Iona Moon. He said country girls always had shit on their shoes and he could smell her after she'd been in his car. Jay Tyler said his choice of women was nobody's business, and if Willy didn't like it, he should keep his back doors locked.

Choice of women, Jay said that so nice. He thought Iona was a woman because the first night they were together he put his hand under her shirt and she didn't stop kissing him. He inched his fingers under her brassiere, like some five-legged animal, until his wrist was caught by the elastic and his hand was squished against her breast. She said, "Here baby, let me help you," and she reached around behind her back and released the hooks. One hand on each breast, Jay Tyler whistled through his teeth. "Sweet Jesus," he said, and unbuttoned her blouse, his fingers clumsy and stiff with the fear that she might change her mind. Jay Tyler had known plenty of girls, girls who let him do whatever he wanted as long as he could take what he was after without any assistance on their part, without ever saying, "Yes Jay," the way Iona did, just a murmur, "yes," soft as snow on water.

In the moonlight, her skin was pale, her breasts small but warm, something a boy couldn't resist. Jay cupped them in his palms, touching the nipples with the very tips of his fingers, as if they were precious and alive, something separate from the girl, something that could still be frightened and disappear. He pressed his lips to the hard bones of Iona Moon's chest, rested his head in the hollow between her breasts and whispered words no boy had ever spoken to her.

He said, "Thank you, oh god, thank you." His voice was hushed and amazed, the voice of a drowning man just pulled from the river. As his mouth found her nipple, Jay Tyler closed his eyes tight, like he wanted to be blind, and Iona Moon almost laughed to see his sweet face wrinkle that way;

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she couldn't help thinking of the newborn pigs, their little eyes glued shut, scrambling for a place at their mother's teats.

Iona supposed Willy Hamilton was right about her shoes, but she was past noticing it herself. Every morning, she got up early to milk the four cows. Mama had always done it before Iona and her brothers were awake. Even in the winter, Hannah Moon trudged to the barn while it was still dark, slogged through the mud and slush, wearing her rubber boots and Daddy's fur-lined coat that she could have wrapped around herself twice. The waves of blue snow across the fields fluttered, each drift a breast heaving, giving up its last breath.

Mama said she liked starting the day that way, in the lightless peace God made before he made the day, sitting with your cheek pressed against the cow's warm flank, your hands on her udder, understanding your pull has to be strong and steady but not too hard, knowing she likes you there and she feels grateful in the way cows do, so she makes a sleepy sound like a moan or a hum, the same sound Iona heard herself make at the edge of a dream.

Willy had a girl, Belinda Beller. She wore braces, and after gym class, Iona saw her stuff her bra with toilet paper. Willy and Belinda, Iona and Jay, parked down by the river in Willy's Chevy. Belinda kept saying, "No honey, please, I don't want to." Jay panted over Iona, licking her neck, slipping his tongue as far in her ear as it would go; her bare back stuck to the vinyl seat, and Willy said, "I'm sorry." His voice was serious and small. "I'm sorry." He said it again, like a six-year-old who had killed his own gerbil by mistake.

Willy thought of his father handcuffing that boy who stole the floodlights from the funeral home. Willy was twelve and liked cruising with his dad, pretending they might get lucky and find some trouble. They caught up with the boy down by the old Miller Creek bridge. His white face rose like a moon above his dark clothes, his eyes enchanted to stone by the twin beams of the headlights.

Horton Hamilton climbed out of the patrol car, one hand on his hip. The thick fingers unsnapped the leather band that held the pistol safe in the holster. Willy's father said,

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"Don't you be gettin' any ideas of makin' like a jackrabbit, boy; I got a gun." He padded towards the skittery, long-legged kid, talking all the time, using the low rumble of his voice to hold the boy in one place, like a farmer trying to mesmerize a dog that's gone mad so he can put a bullet through its head.

Willy recognized the kid. His name was Matt Fry and he lived out west of town on the Kila Flats, a country boy. Horton Hamilton believed you could scare the mischief out of a child. He cuffed Matt Fry as if he were a grown man who'd done a lot worse. He said stealing those lights was no petty crime: they were worth a lot of money, enough to make the theft a felony even though Matt Fry was fifteen years old.

A policeman didn't get much action in White Falls, Idaho, so Horton Hamilton took what business he had seriously. He'd drawn his gun any number of times, or put his hand on it at least, but he'd only had cause to shoot once in nineteen years, and that was to kill a badger that had taken up residence on poor Mrs. Griswold's porch and refused to be driven away by more peaceable means.

Fear of God, fear of the devil, that was good for a boy, but Willy heard later that Matt Fry's parents had had enough of his shenanigans and that a felony was the limit, the very limit. They told the county judge they'd lost control of their boy and it would be best for everyone to lock him up and set him straight. Until then, Willy didn't know that if you did a bad enough thing, your parents could decide they didn't want you anymore.

When Matt Fry came back from the boys' home, he smelled like he forgot sometimes and pissed his own pants; he didn't look at you if you saw him on the street and said, "Hey." His parents still wouldn't let him come home and he slept in a burned-out barn down in the gully. People said Matt Fry got caught fighting his first day at the state home. They threw him in the hole for eighteen days, all by himself, without any light, and when they dragged him out he was like this: lame in one foot, mumbling syllables that didn't add up to words, skinny as a coyote at the end of winter.

Willy stopped pawing at Belinda and sat with his hands in his lap until she leaned over to peck his cheek and say, "It's

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all right now honey." Iona Moon had no sympathy for Belinda Beller's point of view. What sense was there in saving everything up for some special occasion that might not ever come? How do you hold a boy back if it feels good when he slides his knee between your legs? How do you say *no* when his tongue in your ear makes you arch your back and grab his hair?

Willy liked nice girls, girls who accidentally brushed their hands against a guy's crotch, girls who wiggled their butts when they walked past you in the hall, threw their shoulders back and almost closed their eyes when they said hello. Girls who could pull you right up to the edge and still always, always say no.

Iona thought, you hang onto something too long, you start to think it's worth more than it is. She was never that way on account of having three brothers and being the youngest. When she was nine, her oldest brother gave her a penny to dance for him. Before long, they made it regular. Night after night Iona twirled around the barn for Leon, spun in the circle of light from the lantern hanging off the rafter. Dale and Rafe started coming too; she earned three cents a night from her brothers and saved every penny till she had more than four dollars. Later they gave her nickels for lifting her shirt and letting them touch the buds that weren't breasts yet. And one time, when Leon and Iona were alone in the loft, he paid her a dime for lying down and letting him rub against her. She was scared, all that grunting and groaning, and when she looked down she saw that his little prick wasn't little anymore: it was swollen and dark and she yelled, "You're hurting yourself." He clamped his dirty hand over her mouth and hissed. Finally he made a terrible sound, like a cow makes when her calf is halfway out of her; his mouth twisted and his face turned red, as if Iona had choked him. But she hadn't; her arms were flung straight out from her sides; her hands clutched fistfuls of straw. Leon collapsed on his sister like a dead man, and she lay there wondering how she was going to explain to Mama and Daddy that she'd killed him. He crushed the breath out of her; sweat from his face trickled onto hers, and she felt something damp and sticky soaking through her jeans. When she tried to wriggle out from under

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him, he sprang back to life. He pinched her face with one hand. Squeezing her cheeks with his big fingers, he said, "Don't you ever tell, Iona. Mama will hate you if you ever tell."

After that her brothers stopped paying her to dance for them, and Leon made Rafe and Dale cut their thumbs with his hunting knife and swear by their own blood that they'd never tell anyone what they did in the barn that year.

You can't make my brothers do much of anything unless you force them to swear in blood, Iona thought.

One morning after a storm, she tramped out to the barn to do her milking. The wind howled, cutting through her jeans. Snow had drifted against the door; she bent over and dug like a dog. The first stall was empty. She ran to the next, shining her flashlight in every corner, trying to believe a cow could hide in a shadow like a cat, but she knew, even as she ran in circles, she knew all four cows were out in the fields, that her brothers had just assumed an animal will head for shelter on its own. They didn't know cows like Iona and her mama did. A cow's hardly any smarter than a chicken; a cow has half the brains of a pig; a cow's like an overgrown child, like the Wilkerson boy who grew tall and fat but never got smart.

She heard them. As she ran across the fields, stumbling in the snow, falling on her face more than once and snorting ice through her nose, she heard them crying like old women. The four of them huddled together, standing up past their knees in the drifts. Snow had piled in ridges down their backs; they hadn't moved all night. They let out that sound, that awful wail, like their souls were being torn out of them. Iona had to whip them with her belt to get them going; that's how cows are: they'll drop to their knees and freeze to death with their eyes wide open and the barn door barely a hundred feet in front of them.

Later, Iona took Mama her aspirin and hot milk, sat on the edge of her bed and moaned like the cows, closing her eyes and stretching her mouth wide as it would go. Mama breathed deep with laughter, holding her stomach; the milk sloshed in the cup and Iona had to hold it. Mama had a bad

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time holding on to things. Her fingers were stiff and twisted, and that winter, her knees swelled up so big she couldn't walk.

Iona Moon told Jay Tyler how it was in the winter on the Kila Flats, how the wind had nothing to stand in its way, how the water froze in the pipes and you had to use the outhouse, how you held it just as long as you could because the snow didn't fall, it blew straight in your face; splinters of ice pierced your skin and you could go blind or lose your way just walking to that little hut twenty-five yards behind the house. She told him she kept a thundermug under her bed in case she had to pee in the night. But she didn't tell him her mama had to use a bedpan all the time, and Iona was the one who slid it under her bony butt because Mama said it wasn't right for the man you love to see you that way.

Mama knew Iona had a guy. She made Iona tell her that Jay Tyler was on the diving team in the summer. He could fly off the high board backwards, do two somersaults and half a twist; he seemed to open the water with his hands, and his body made a sound like a flat stone you spin sideways so it cuts without a splash: blurp, that's all. Mama worked the rest of it out of Iona too. Jay's father was a dentist with a pointed gray beard and no hair. Jay was going to college so he could come back to White Falls and go into business with his dad. Iona said it like she was proud, but Mama shook her head and blinked hard at her gnarled hands, trying to make something go away. She said, "If I was a strong woman, Iona, I'd lock you in this house till you got over that boy. I'd rather have you hate me than see your heart be broke."

"Jay's not like that," Iona said.

"Every boy's like that in the end. Dentists don't marry the daughters of potato farmers. He'll be lookin' for a girl with an education." She didn't talk that way to be mean. Iona knew Mama loved her more than anyone alive.

Willy thought that just listening to Jay Tyler and his father might be dangerous, a bad thing that made his stomach thump like a second heart. Horton Hamilton had raised his son to believe there was one way that was right and one way

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that was wrong and nothing, absolutely nothing in between. Willy said, "What if someone steals food because he's hungry?" And his father said, "Stealing's wrong." Willy said, "If a man's dying, if he feels his whole body filling up with pain, would the Lord blame him for taking his own life?" Horton Hamilton rubbed his chin. "The Lord would *forgive* him, Willy, because that's the good Lord's way, but no man has the right to choose his time of death, or any other man's time of death." Willy thought he had him now. "Why do you carry a gun?" His father said his gun was to warn and to wound, but only if there was no other way. He liked talking better.

Willy remembered the way his father talked to Matt Fry. He saw Matt Fry hobbling down the middle of the street, his head bobbing, his pants crusted with dirt, smelling of piss. He thought maybe Matt Fry would have been better off if his father had shot him dead at Miller Creek. And he bowed his head with the shame of letting himself think it.

Jay Tyler's dad wanted to be a lawyer but became a dentist like his own father instead. He taught Jay to argue both sides of every question with equal passion. When Willy told him there was one right and one wrong and all you had to do was look in the Bible to see which was which, Andrew Johnson Tyler scratched his bald head and said, "Well Willy, I tell you, it's hard for a *medical man* to believe in god." Willy couldn't figure out why, but there was something about the way Dr. Tyler said "medical man," some secret reverence, that made Willy afraid to question him.

Jay's mother floated across the veranda, her footsteps so soft that Willy glanced at her feet to be sure they touched wood. The folds of her speckled dress fell forward and back; Willy saw the outline of her thighs and had to look away. "All this talk, all this talk," she said. "How about some lemonade? I'm so dry I could choke." Everything about her was pale: her cheeks, flushed from the heat; the sweep of yellow hair, wound in a bun but not too tight; a few blond tendrils swirling at the nape of her neck, damp with her own sweat; the white dress with tiny pink roses, cut low in front so that when she leaned forward and said, "Why don't you help me, Willy," he saw the curve of her breasts.

In the kitchen, she brushed his hair from his eyes, touched

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his hand, almost like she didn't mean to do it, but he knew. He scurried out to the porch with the lemonade on a tray, ice rattling against glass. From the cool shadows of the house, he swore he heard a woman holding her laughter in her throat.

Willy lost his way on the Kila Flats. All those dirt roads looked the same. Jay told him: turn left, turn right, take another right at the fork; he sent Willy halfway around the county so he'd have time in the back seat with Iona Moon, time to unhook her bra, time to unzip his pants. Willy kept looking in the rearview mirror; he'd dropped Belinda Beller off hours ago. He imagined his father cruising Main and Woodvale Park, looking for him. He imagined his mother at the window, parting the drapes with one hand, pressing her nose to the glass. She worried. She saw a metal bumper twisted around a tree, a wheel spinning a foot above the ground, headlights blasting into the black woods. She washed the blood off the faces of the four teenagers, combed their hair, dabbed their bruises with flesh-colored powder, painted their blue lips a fresh, bright pink. That was back in '57, but she saw their open eyes and surprised mouths every time Willy was late. "Forgive me, Lord, for not trusting you. I know my thoughts are a curse. I know he's safe with you, Lord, and he's a good boy, a careful boy, but I can't help my worrying, Lord: he's my only son. I love my girls, but he's special, you see, in that way." She unlaced her fingers and hissed, "I'll thrash his hide when he walks in that door." She said it out loud because God only listened to prayers and silence. He was too busy to pay attention to all the clatter of words spoken in ordinary tones.

Jay said, "Shit Willy, you took the wrong turn back there. I told you *right* at the fork." And Willy said he did go right, and Jay answered, "We'd be in front of Iona's house if you went right." There was something in Jay's voice, a creak or a gurgle in the throat, that gave him away. Willy slammed the brakes; his Chevy did a quarter spin that threw Jay and Iona against the door. "What the hell?" said Jay.

"Get out,". Willy said.

"What?"

"You heard me. Get out of my car."

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Jay zipped his pants and opened the door; Iona started to climb out after him. "Just Jay," Willy said, and he got out too. The front window was cracked open enough for Iona to hear Willy say, "You're gonna get me grounded because you wanna fool around with that little slut." Jay shoved Willy over the hood of the car, and Iona watched the dust curl in the streams of yellow light, waiting for the blow. But Jay didn't hit him; he held him there, leaning on top of him, ten seconds, twenty; and when he let Willy up, Jay clapped him on the shoulder, said, "Sorry buddy, I'll make it up to you."

Jay stood on the diving board, lean and tan, unbeatable. Willy was almost as good, some days better; but next to Jay he was pale and scrawny, unconvincing. Jay rolled off the balls of his feet, muscles flexing from his calves to his thighs. He threw an easy one first, a single somersault in lay-out position. As he opened up above the water, Iona gasped, expecting him to swoop back into the air.

Willy did the same dive, nearly as well. All day they went on this way, first one, then the other; Jay led Willy by a point and a half; the rest of the field dropped by ten.

Jay saved the backwards double somersault with a twist for last. He climbed the ladder slowly, as if he had to think about the dive rung by rung. His buttocks bunched up tight, clenched like fists. On the board he rolled his shoulders, shook his hands, his feet. He strutted to the end, raised his arms, and spun on his toes. Every muscle frozen, he grit his teeth and leaped, clamped his knees to his chest and heaved head over heel, once, twice, opened up and twisted, his limbs straight as a drill.

But in that last moment, Jay Tyler's concentration snapped. By some fluke, some sudden weakness, his knees bent and his feet slapped the water.

Iona thought she'd see Jay spit with disgust as he gripped the gutter of the pool, but he came up grinning, flashing his straight, white teeth, his father's best work. Willy offered his hand. "I threw it too hard, buddy," Jay said. Buddy. Iona stood outside the chain-link fence; she barely heard it, but it made her think of that dusty road; stars flung in the cool black sky by a careless hand; Willy pinned to the hood of the

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car; and Jay saying, *Sorry buddy, I'll make it up to you.* Only this way, Willy would never know. It was just like Jay not to give a damn about blame or forgiveness.

Willy's dive was easier, two somersaults without a twist, but flawless. He crept ahead of Jay, and no one else touched their scores. They sauntered to the bathhouse with their arms around each other's shoulders, knowing they'd won the day.

Standing in the dappled light beneath an oak, Jay Tyler's mother hugged Willy and Jay, and his father pumped their hands. Willy wished his parents would have seen him, this day above all others, but his father was on duty; and old lady Griswold had died, so his mother was busy making her look prettier than she ever was.

Iona Moon shuffled towards them, head down, eyes on the ground. Willy nudged Jay. In a single motion, graceful as the dive he almost hit, Jay turned, smiled, winked, and flicked his wrist near his thigh, a wave that said everything: go away, Iona; can't you see I'm with *my parents*? Willy felt the empty pit of his stomach, a throb of blood in his temples that made him dizzy, as if he were the one shooed away, as if he slunk in the shadows and disappeared beind the thick trunk of the tired tree, its limbs drooping with their own weight.

He was ashamed, like the small boy squinting under the fluorescent lights of the bathroom. His mother stripped his flannel pajamas off him with quick, hard strokes and said, "You're *soaked*, Willy; you're absolutely *drowned*."

Upstairs the air was still and hot, but Hannah Moon couldn't stand the noise of the fan and told Iona, no, please, don't turn it on. Iona said, "I'm going to town tonight, Mama. You want anything?"

"Why don't you just stay here and read to me till I fall asleep? What are you planning in town?"

"Nothing, nothing at all in particular. I get this desire, you know. It's so dark out here at night, just our little lights and the black fields and the blacker hills. I want to see a whole blaze of lights, all the streetlamps going on at once, all the houses burning—like something's about to happen. You have to believe something's going to happen."

"Don't you go looking for him," Mama said. "Don't you go

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looking for that boy. I know he hasn't called you once since school got out. Bad enough what he did, but don't you go making it worse by being a fool."

"He's nothing to me, Mama. You want a treat or something, maybe a magazine?"

"Take a dollar from my jewelry box and get me as much chocolate as that'll buy. And don't you tell your daddy, promise?"

"Promise."

"He thinks it's not good for me; I think I've got to have some pleasure."

Daddy sat on the porch with Leon and Rafe and Dale. They rocked in the great silence of men, each with his pipe, each with the same tilt of the head as if a single thought wove through their minds. A breeze high in the pines made the tops sway so the limbs rubbed up against one another. The sound they made was less than a breath, a whisper in a dream or the last thing your mother said before she kissed you good night. You were too small to understand the words, but you knew from her voice that you were loved and safe; the kiss on your forehead was a whisper too, a promise no one could keep.

Iona buzzed up and down Main, feeling strong riding up high in the cab of Daddy's red truck, looking down on cars and rumbling over potholes too fast. Daddy kept a coil of rope, a hacksaw and a rifle in the back behind the seat. She had no intention, no intention at all, but she swung down Willow Glen Road, past Jay Tyler's house. She honked her horn at imaginary children in the street, stomped on her brakes and laid rubber to avoid a cat that wasn't there; but all that noise didn't lure anyone out of the Tyler house, and no lights popped on upstairs or down. In the green light of dusk, the house looked gray and cool, a huge lifeless thing waiting to crumble.

She sped towards Seventh, Willy Hamilton's street. She might just happen to roll by, and maybe in the course of conversation she'd say, "Are the Tylers out of town?" Not that she cared; she was only mildly curious. "The house looks absolutely deserted," she'd say. "I don't know why anyone would want to live in that big old thing."

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Sure enough, Willy stood in the driveway, hosing down his sky blue Chevrolet. Iona leaned out the window. "Hey Willy," she said. He wrinkled up his forehead and didn't say anything. Iona was undaunted. "You wanna go get an ice cream with me?" she said. The spray from the hose made a clear arc before it spattered on the cement and trickled towards the gutter in thick muddy rivulets.

Willy was feeling sorry for her in a way. But he still didn't like her, and he didn't think he could stand the smell of her truck. He told himself to be brave; it wouldn't last long, and it was such a small thing to do, such a small, kind gesture; then he felt very proud, overcome with the realization that he was going to do this good thing.

He was still thinking how generous he was when they finished their cones and Iona jolted out along the river road instead of heading towards his house. He said, "Where are you going?" And she said, "The river." He told her he needed to get home; it was almost dark. Iona said, "I know." He told her he meant it, but his voice was feeble, and she kept plowing through the haze of dusk, faster and faster, till the whole seat was shaking.

She swerved down to the bank of the river where all the kids came to park; but it was too early for that, so they were alone. Willy stared at the water, at the beer bottles bobbing near the shore, and the torn-off limb of a tree being dragged downstream. "I'm sorry about Jay," he said.

"Why're you sorry? He's not dead."

"He didn't treat you right."

Iona slid across the seat so her thigh pressed against Willy's thigh. "Would you treat me right?" she said. He tried to inch away, but there was nowhere to go. Iona's hand rested on his knee, then started moving up his leg, real slow. Willy swatted it away. "You still think I'm a slut?" Iona said. She touched his thigh again, lightly, higher than before. "I'm not a slut, Willy; I'm just more *generous* than most girls you know." She clutched his wrist and tried to pull his closed hand to her breast. "Don't be afraid," she said. "You won't be fingering Kleenex when you get a grip on my titties." Willy looked so confused that Iona blew a snort of laughter out her nose, right in his face. "You don't know, do you sweetheart? You don't know Belinda Beller's boobs are made of paper."

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"I don't want to hear you say her name." Willy said.

"Fine," said Iona, breathing in his ear, "I don't wanna talk about her either."

Willy felt the pressure in his crotch, his penis rising against his will. He thought of his mother putting lipstick and rouge on old Mrs. Griswold after she died, but even that didn't help this time.

Iona Moon pounced on top of him, kissing his mouth and locking the door at the same time. She fumbled with his belt, clawed at his zipper. He mumbled *no*, but she smothered the word, swallowed it up in her own mouth.

When Willy wrestled his sisters, his father told him to be careful: The strong have to look out for the weak, he said. It didn't matter that his sisters were older. Even if they jumped him two at a time, Willy was the one who had to go easy. He wasn't strong enough to win a fight without hurting them, without kicking and wrenching and taking a few blind swings, so he had to hold back. Most times he was lucky just to get away.

Willy clamped Iona's arms, but she twisted free. "You know you want it, Willy," she said. "Everybody wants it." But he didn't, not like this, not with Iona Moon. She bit at his lips and his ears, sharp little nips; her fingers between his legs cupped his balls dangerously tight.

With his hands on her shoulders, he shoved her back, flung her against the dashboard so hard it stunned her, and he had time to unlock the door, leap, and flee. But he didn't get far before he heard the unmistakable sputter of tires in mud, an engine revving, going nowhere. Slowing to a trot, he listened; rock it, he thought, first to reverse, first to reverse.

He heard her grind through the gears, imagined her slamming the stick, stamping the clutch, thought that by now tears streamed down her hot cheeks. Finally he heard the engine idle down, a pitiful, defeated sound in the near darkness.

Slowly he turned, knowing what he had to do, hearing his father's voice: A gentleman always helps a lady in distress. She's no lady. Who are you to judge?

He found small dead branches and laid them under the tires in two-foot rows. One steady push, his feet braced against a tree, one more, almost, third time's charm, and the front tires caught the sticks, spun, spit up mud all the way to

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his mouth, and heaved the truck backwards onto solid ground. He wiped his hands on his jeans and clumped towards the road.

"Hey," said Iona, "don't you want a ride?" He kept marching. "Hey Willy, get in. I won't bite." She pulled up right beside him. "It'll take you more than an hour to get home. Your mama will skin you. Now get in. I won't lay a hand on you." He didn't dare look at her. His face felt swollen, about to explode. "What I did before, I didn't mean anything by it. I never would have tried anything if I thought you wouldn't like it. Willy?" He glanced up at her; she seemed no bigger than a child hanging on to that huge steering wheel. "Willy, I got a gun. Right here behind the seat, I got my daddy's gun." *Don't you be gettin' any ideas of makin' like a jackrabbit, boy.* Willy didn't know if Iona meant it as a warning or a threat, but he knew there was nothing real behind her words, no reason not to get in the truck, no reason except his pride and that seemed like a small thing when he weighed it against the five-mile trek along the winding road, his mother's pinched face, and the spot of grease from her nose on the windowpane.

White Falls sat in a hollow, a fearful cluster of lights drawn up in a circle for the night, a town closed in on itself. Iona said, "I almost died once. My brother Leon and I started back from town in a storm that turned to a blizzard. Everything was white, like there was nothing in the world besides us and the inside of this truck. Leon drove straight into a six-foot drift; it looked just the same as the sky and the road. We had to get out and walk, or sit there and freeze like the damn cows. We stumbled, breaking the wind with our hands; then we crawled because the gusts were less wild near the ground. I saw the shadows of houses wavering in the snow, right in front of us, but they were never there. A sheet of ice built up around my cheek and chin, and I kept stopping to shatter it with my fist, but it took too long; Leon said, leave it, it will stop the wind. I thought they'd find me that way, the girl in glass, and they'd keep me frozen in a special truck, take me from town to town along with the nineteen-inch man and the two-headed calf. But Leon, Leon never thought for a minute we were going to die on that road. When I dropped to my belly and said I was warm now, he swatted my butt. Not this

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way, he said, not this way, God. And then I wondered if he'd whispered it or if I heard what he was thinking. Leon talking to God, I thought; that was more of a miracle than surviving, and I scrambled back to my knees and lunged forward.

"Just like a dog, Leon knew his way. I forgave him for everything. I swore in my heart I'd never hold a harsh thought against him, not for anything in the past or anything he might do later on, because right there in that moment, he was saving our lives.

"When Mama wrapped my hands in warm rags and my daddy pulled off my boots to rub my toes as hard as he could, I knew that nothing, nothing in the world was ever going to matter so much again." She punched the clutch and shifted into fourth. "Do you know why I'm telling you this?" Willy nodded, but he didn't know; he didn't know at all.

It wasn't until Iona Moon eased into her driveway and shut off the engine that she remembered her mother's chocolate and the ragged dollar bill still crumpled in her pocket. *I think I've got to have some pleasure*, that was the last thing Mama said. She rested her head on the steering wheel. A single sob erupted, burst from between her ribs as if someone had pounded his fist against her chest. She fought her own cry, choked it dry, and was silent.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

Deserving Princess

Princess was much better than she'd realized when they'd bought her three weeks ago. Princess had put on condition since she'd been out in the paddock and ridden nearly every day. Princess was marvellous, worth ever so much more than they'd paid. She began to think about how that elderly well-off man had sold them the sleek chestnut mare, talking all the time about his grown-up daughter in Australia. Sometimes, nowadays, she could understand things like that about grown-ups—adults—like why he'd let Princess go so cheap to them. Really, Princess was too good: or, well, for Princess, she wasn't good enough. Not yet.

She was still doing homework, upstairs, when the phone rang, and she heard her mother go through to answer. Then she went on with geometry. The mother called up.

"It's the police . . . it's about Princess . . . you'd better come down and speak to them."

She felt more excited than frightened, which was a surprise. Her mother followed her back into the room where the phone was, and stood, waiting to hear, resting one hand on the bookcase, one on the corner of a chair. The voice asked if she was the girl who had a horse down in that small field beyond the Bradwells Fen Barns. She listened.

"All right," she said. "I'll come down on my bike and see if I can find her." The police made a point of it that she should let them know, and rang off, straight away, a bit quick.

"It's very late," her mother said, "and it's begun to rain . . ."

"I can't not do anything, can I?" she demanded crossly. "If she gets over the river bridge she might stray on all night. She might go right back to Downham." Downham was where they had bought the mare that three weeks ago.

"They don't sound very sure . . ."

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"She'd look big, in the dark—and I know where she got through, it's by that elder bush on the other side, I saw the place only this evening. And I've seen her over there before, I ought to have done something straight away, like a fool," she said.

"I wish your father weren't out tonight—we'd better go together."

She got rattled, a bit more. "Lot of good he'd be. Anyway he couldn't drive off the road. And I'm going down on my bike . . ."

"It's much too late for you to go alone—"

"If you'd just let me come through," she interrupted, sarcastically. "It's nearly two miles to walk—I'll bike, and I'll have to go." She pushed past, took up her coat as she went past, threw the bridle loosely over her shoulder, unlocked the door and went straight out to where her bike was. The street light was flickering with the rain that slanted across it, the rain made that steady quiet hiss all round. The road was empty. She pedalled fast through the empty town. The bike creaked. They'd said their patrol car would go further on and look out for her on its way back. Before the end of the houses there were big puddles, she didn't care about missing them much and they splashed right up her legs. Anyway she didn't always see them because her front light was nearly done for, and now it began to flicker and go right out sometimes. She began to feel a kind of cold, soaky weight across her shoulders, but still, there was a bit of a wind and it drove her along.

The tire noise got louder as she gathered speed, off the old island down on to the deep fen. That was when she heard the cantering. It was a good way ahead, but she could hear it easily, on the metalled road somewhere. It was like a call, it made her go faster without thinking, and breathe faster too.

So she pedalled hard and went straight on past the Barns, over the crossing, couldn't hear it for a minute and then heard it again. A car was coming, still a good way off on the other side of the river, but she could see the loom of its lights over the hump where the road ran over the bridge arch, and then she just glimpsed the shape of the free horse, all dark, going over the bridge, at a trot now, and it shied a bit, it must

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have seen the blaze of the car lights. Then, there came the blinding blaze in her own eyes, as it came head on, undipped. She got right up on the grass as it tore past and her outside leg got splashed a lot. Then the darkness came back. It hadn't been the police car. Over the bridge, right in the dark now, she could see a good few lights, Littlehythe over left, and the orange ones at the new roundabout, a good four miles away. The rain made a special sound, thinner but harder, on the river, as she glanced up that long straight reach going north, and saw just how much rain there was.

There was no cantering now. But as she coasted down off the bridge, there came a sudden scurry of hooves, probably the horse had seen her as she'd come over the top. Almost at once, the drumming of the hooves changed, she could just hear the softer, splashier noise, muffled. What must have happened was that Princess had gone off the road and down the Drove that came just before Anderson's farm, Anderson's Lower Drove they called it, and she knew it, she'd ridden down with Princess only last week. You had to keep on the verge all the way because of the deep black mud the tractor made. They'd had to wend through coarse stands of mugwort and willowweed, going at a walk, tonight there wasn't a hope of cycling, and there was miles of open fen now for Princess to stray across. She didn't even know how the land ran up to the north, or away east towards where the higher ground began, first the poplar woods for matchsticks, then the forest itself. Suddenly she felt hungry, then straight away after, she felt sleepy, a moment of being sleepy.

She remembered the Upper Drove, though. The Upper Drove was more or less metalled, and ran along on the other side of the next drain, just beyond the farm, swinging round in a big curve, through the tillage, and turned back to the drain after about half a mile. If she went down that and got across the water she'd be there first, and could walk back and meet the horse. As she pedalled past, there was a light in the farm. She thought of asking them to help, and then she thought not. Over that lighted window they just had what looked like a stretch of old sheet, or an old pillowcase, inside it looked more like a lamp than electric.

The police car came over the bridge, fast, its headlights

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picked her up and they switched on the blue roller-light, flashing, and stopped beside her. She recognized the copper in the front seat, beside the driver. He just wound the window down a couple of inches.

"You the girl looking for the horse?" he asked. The other one had picked up their transmitter and was talking into it, "Tango" something he kept saying.

"It's a mare," she answered.

A bit of a pause. "We wouldn't know," the policeman said, and she told them she'd seen Princess going off the road, and she was going down the Drove after her. She didn't say about getting over the stream.

"Don't get wet," he said, checking a grin. "We've got something to get to up the road, we'll look out for you on our way back. Take care . . ."

Then he picked up the radio and started about "Tango" while the other one drove the car off. He shut the window up tight, the other one accelerated fast.

Down the Drove the darkness was heavier, the rain seemed colder. The ruined building, with its straggly elder bushes and one small tree showed up at last, and the footbridge over the Drain, just by where the Drove turned sharp east.

But when she dropped the bike on the verge and started over the bridge, it was far too shaky and creaky. Half the footboards had gone. It would be better to swim at a good place than fall in along with all the baulks of wood and the nails jutting out of them. She could remember where there was a stretch of hard ground on the far bank; and she hurried along to opposite it, and scrambled down, parting the tall, rough plants. She went straight into the dimpling rained-on water. It was warmer than the rain, and four of those big easy strokes she could do now got her to pulling out on the far side. The water made her feel relaxed and strong, but suddenly, without the bike, it was much lonelier, suddenly she didn't like it.

When she'd climbed up the west bank and could see the open country again and a few lights still in the distance from the town there was a breeze again, quite cold. Then she began to laugh, because there was more water dripping off her

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than the rain was raining on her; so in a way, she was getting drier, that was good at least.

She heard the horse . . . quite near, walking . . . stopping a moment to graze . . . not hurrying at all. She thought she would walk towards it, then she thought she would wait. She waited. "Princess," she called when it was near, she could just see the shape. "Come on Princess." A moving in the dark, and she saw it, plain, it was much nearer than she'd thought. It wasn't Princess.

Besides that, she knew what horse it was, she'd seen it more than once, out on the Washes with others although she didn't know whom it belonged to. It was a bit bigger than Princess, and she knew it didn't have such a nice face. Anyway it was a gelding—you'd think anyone would know, even the police in their cars.

What to do she didn't quite know now, but the horse knew. It whinnied and snorted, with a start, and turned back sharply, trotted off, splashing, fast, all in one. Now it had quite gone. Well, that was that. She wasn't going to catch it, and anyway she didn't want to try.

If she wasn't going to walk all the way back to the house or else right the way round to the bike she'd have to swim again. This time she took off her shoes and her socks too, because she didn't know any hard patch to land on, the other side. Sure enough, although she found exactly the same bit to go back across, as she climbed out with her shoelaces tied together and gripped in her teeth, the rich mud suddenly made a suck at her, one leg, fiercely, right up her thigh to the top. She dug in a panic into the soft rooty bank-earth with her other toes and all her fingers. Her big bare toes got a good hold and gave a big push, and she felt the other leg come out, its brief moment of uselessness as it was leaving the mud and before she could get it on the bank. Then, there was the bike, and when she got on, the saddle pressed her soaking clothes right into her. She felt runnels of water going down each arm, another down her spine, and two more, one each side, round onto her belly as she pedalled back to the road.

A car was going along it, slowly, nearly stopping a moment, then going on, then nearly stopping again. It must be the pa-

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trol car going back, looking for her on its way, but it was already past Anderson's Farm, well on the way to the river bridge, gathering speed. As she came up to Anderson's there was a door flung open, and a figure against the yellow of the room, a woman calling out.

"That you Bry? What are you doing? Why don't you come in?" When she didn't answer the figure seemed to dwindle, to shrivel, it turned round in a great hurry and slammed the door shut; and she went on herself, just as fast as she could, till she got back to the river bridge. She thought she could just see the lights of the police car, right up by the first lights of the town. She thought of the dry warm car, and she thought of her father, asleep probably by now on his dry warm boat, that he'd gone off in that afternoon, when the wind had been so good, to sail right up to the big lock at Denfleet. Men.

The main thing was to get to Princess, she just wanted to get to Princess. She dropped the bike in the hedge by the paddock and went straight over at the gap the short way to the old weather-boarded outbuilding that had no front, you couldn't shut Princess in. But this time she was there. You could hear her breathing before you could see her, she was lying on her flank, she lifted her head, and then relaxed again, she took almost no notice of the girl who stood there looking, waiting, resting one hand on the post at the corner of the shed, the other was in mid-air.

The mare stood up when she got closer. The mare waited. She touched her, broad, and warm, really powerful as her muscles began to ripple a little under the wet touch. She put her head against the horse's neck, and her arms about the shoulders, and she found her rainy face was getting wet with a lot of tears. She hadn't felt a bit like crying, and now she was crying and crying, her new breasts were heaving the way she'd never felt them heave before, close against the heavy mare. She felt she was almost choking, and she couldn't stop although she tried. The mud from the drain bank was coming off onto the horse, her fingers kept moving about and they kept running into it, all soft, like a paste.

"Princess, Princess, Princess," she was saying "it wasn't you,

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it wasn't you, you were here, all the time"; and the mare began to get restless, shifting about in the almost dark, and her clothes were so wet and clingy she began to shudder, she wasn't cold but she was shuddering, the crying stopped of its own accord but still she was shuddering.

In the old dustbin at the back where she kept the curry-comb and dandybrush and things there was a pullover and a scrumpled-up pair of jods, but there was nothing to dry on except—well, yes, there was the last of the winter hay, it was in a pile right by the dustbin. She took off all her clothes, even her socks. She was frightened. There was almost no light, but when she looked down she could see herself, ever so pale, somehow a bit pearly, except for the new black bit in the middle, but ever so strong these days, and lean like a boy. She hurried, gripping the big clumsy wisps of the hay, it was scratchy to dry on till it got damp with her wet. As she was reaching out for another wisp Princess twisted round, you could just see her mouth grinning, and took the hay out of her hand. There was just that greedy, steady munching. She took another handful, then another, rubbing downwards each time, it got scratchier and scratchier as she got drier. Each time Princess swung round, waiting to take it in her teeth, dropping a bit if it was too wet and eating the rest. It felt as if Princess were drying her. She felt good enough now.

She had a moment of terror when she saw the light of a torch coming down the rambly path to the fieldgate; but anybody could recognize that feeble flickery old torch, and that slow, familiar way whoever it was came down and knew to scramble over the gate not try to open it. So she hurried into her clothes and as soon as she'd got them on she called out, "Is that you, it's Me," which was what they always called. "It wasn't her, she's here," she went on. "She's been here all the time."

Now her mother had taken her by the arms and was looking up into her face (these days, she was taller), trying to see her, holding her quite tight. She dropped the torch, that had gone out; but when it landed on the ground it came on, shining straight into the hedge.

"It's nearly midnight . . . oh I am glad, I'm so glad. I've

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hurried . . . let me sit down somewhere . . . no, it doesn't matter. Are you all right? You must have been here a long time. Have you dried her?"

"She didn't get out I told you, you weren't listening. You never do. But I got wet all right!"

"Were the roads all splashy? It's stopping a bit now." But her mother's coat was wet and her hair was wet too.

"I had to swim across Anderson's Drain—and back—and then it wasn't Princess at all, one of those Barnards' horses I think. I've seen them out on the Washes. It was bigger than Princess and ugly too. I saw it but I wasn't going after it, it had strayed all right but anyway I couldn't have."

"Swam! Oh good Lord . . . but you're all dry! You must have got soaked swimming across a Drain. Have you got your bike all right? I'm so glad you're . . ."

She interrupted her. "Of course I got soaked. But I dried off once I saw Princess was all right. She'd been here the whole time."

"But it's quite cold and you're bone dry. What's this you've got on, it's just a jersey."

"I dried myself out, with bits of hay. Then she started eating them."

"Do you mean you took your clothes off? Down here? Oh you're awful. You're really awful. You just don't know how to look after yourself. You'll get cold or raped or something."

"I'd like to see them try. I could knock someone out. And I'm warmer than you, you're all tired . . . oh you are good." She chuckled a bit, and gulped. Then she put her arms right round her mother and began to laugh.

Her mother began to laugh too. "Look at that old horse," she said, "she must think we're nuts." But she wasn't looking at Princess, she was looking at her big daughter, and laughing. She put her arms right round her daughter, and she put her head on her daughter, and they both began to laugh, rocking to and fro, the shed filled with the laughing, while Princess pulled a bit at the wisps of hay, eating slowly, and then what she did was let a long, quiet, relaxed fart, but the two women were still laughing, on and on, laughing and laughing, and they didn't hear, not a thing.

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BERT O. STATES

Northrop Frye and the Anatomy of Wit

Frye often says that man lives in two worlds, "the world he sees and the world he constructs, the world he lives in and the world he wants to live in."[1] Applying this notion to Frye's own work, we may say that there is, on one hand, the world of the theory (modes, genres, symbols, etc.) in which he tries to make sense of our civilization, particularly its literature, and, on the other, a hinterland of illustrations used to support the theory, drawn, usually through artistic examples, from the order of nature and the environment (CP, p. 56). The relation of these two worlds to one another—when the second is thought of as a world at all—has not aroused much interest, partly because the theory itself is so astonishing and partly because Frye's figural powers speak for themselves as one of the many riches of his "richly-stored" mind.[2] Besides, what can you say about examples and illustrations? We all use them continually to support our theories and ideas. Yet odd things can happen in this simple process. For example, there is the problem raised by Paul de Man in his essay on Kleist's marionette theatre: "We all know the relief one feels," de Man says, "when [an abstract philosophical text] is interrupted by what we call a 'concrete' example. Yet at that very moment, when we think at last that we understand, we are fur-

[1] Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York and London, 1963), p. 151.

Hereafter, Frye's work will be abbreviated as follows:

AC *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957)
CL *Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature: A Collection of Review Essays* (1978)
CP *The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (1971)
FI *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (1963)
SS *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976)
GC *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982)
StS *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* (1970)

[2] M. H. Abrams, "Anatomy of Criticism," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, No. 28, 1959, p. 196.

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ther from comprehension than ever. . . . Instead of inscribing the particular in the general, which is the purpose of any cognition, one has reversed the process and replaced the understanding of a proposition by the perception of a particular, forgetting that the possibility of such a transaction is precisely the burden of the proposition in the first place."[3] In short, the example is necessarily a "betrayal" of the truth it is supposed to convey. This is a complex and no doubt debatable problem, but perhaps it will illustrate a point I want to make about Frye's two worlds. Is it possible that he has reversed the process of exemplification: instead of inscribing the particular in the general (of his theory of literature) he has inscribed the general in the particular? You may ask: what's the difference? I would say that it is just the difference, at the extreme, between a non-literary text and a literary text, or between a novel and a treatise on the novel. That is: the treatise will borrow instances from the novel to illustrate its proposition, whereas the novel, based (as Aristotle would say) on probability, will itself be an example of the kinds of propositions one might derive from experience—such as: absolute power corrupts absolutely, virtue is its own reward, pride goeth before a fall, and so on. It will inscribe them *in* action. In Frye's case, of course, we are not *at* the extreme, but we have been saying for years that Frye is a "creative" critic, and it is useful to recall what he himself said about the anatomy form: it "eventually begins to merge with the novel, producing various hybrids" (AC, 312).

To trace all this into my own experience: many years ago it occurred to me that I was reading Frye mainly for pleasure, as opposed (I suppose) to instruction, and that this pleasure had something to do with what I was being made to see in my mind's eye as I read and, I must add, how I was being made to see it. I often had trouble remembering which phase or mode something belonged to, but I could remember what it looked like and that it could be found at the top, or the bottom, of whatever right- or left-hand page it was on. Moreover, I could often remember what company it was keeping on that page, or nearby; so that, overall, I had the impression

[3] Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984), p. 276.

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of a world busily being itself—or so it thought—organized into clusters of life, little atemporal kingdoms of threatened virgins, envious or dying gods, risen dead men, and exposed children; but at the same time in the sway of ubiquitous abstract forces in somewhat the same way that Natural Selection is said to control the conduct of life in the world we actually live in.

In other words, this strange relation between the invisible proposition and the visible particular yielded a distinct kind of life and liveliness. It is not an intermittent thing; as I say, it arises steadily from the prose itself, from the voice, and from a special way in which Frye endows his particulars with generality. We might say of Frye what Frye says of Blake and Joyce: "the chief principle of [his] symbolism is the concrete universal, the identity of the individual and the class, which he expresses in the metaphor of distance" (FI, 256). The latter phrase, "the metaphor of distance," would be even better suited to my purposes if we read it in reverse as *the distance of metaphor*, the idea being that Frye is basically a metaphorical thinker. This has little to do with making metaphors, but with seeing the world as a metaphorical process. In order to do this you must instinctively know where to stand, which is roughly the distance between *thing* and *shape*. For example, imagine yourself standing, preferably on a slight rise, "looking down on the scene," as Frye would say of the ironic mode, about thirty yards from a family reunion. Here grandparents, parents, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, are having a picnic. You watch and listen and you soon fall into a metaphorical trance in which you begin noticing motifs and continuities: you see where the grandson got his slouch, the daughter her wide forehead and freckles, the father his stentorian voice, and how a fondness for fatty meats runs in the family. As you notice all this you begin, inaudibly, to laugh—not at the family but at the fact that these people constitute a family. In each "member" is inscribed a genetic proposition, though you would be hard-pressed to say what this proposition was; but behind what each person *is* is something he or she cannot help being. And this is a comic perception of the world: it is a variation of Bergson's mechanical encrusting itself on the living, of the humor theory of self-

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repetition, of metaphor, which is always faintly funny, and finally of archetype itself which is, after all, nothing more than a metaphor that doesn't know when to stop.

Let me offer an example of the Frye distance. In this one the metaphor is already elaborately in progress and it concerns the similarities and differences between animals and humans in the post-Edenic world. But it is mainly the voice that interests me:

> These satyrs, though not quite human, are not quite evil either: they represent perhaps what human life would be like if human beings were as completely adjusted to the "fallen" level of nature as animals and plants are. Their lives consist, in Eliot's phrase, of birth and copulation and death; but they regard copulation as the only sensible way of putting in the time between birth and death. (SS, 99)

The kicker in this passage, for me, is the word *sensible*, probably because it is so rarely advanced as a rationale for uninterrupted copulation. But the whole passage reeks of *sense*, and *sensible* is simply at the summit of a running incongruity between voice and picture. There is nothing wonderful, or "faerie" in the passage and certainly nothing erotic; in fact, the satyrs strike one as being rather bourgeois human beings with strange hairy legs who have found a workable solution to Heidegger's problem of being-in-time.

Moreover, if you separate this account from its context in a book about romance, you would be puzzled about where it may have come from. Apart from the Eliot allusion, you might think it had been written by Darwin ("These waterfowl live mainly in the glades surrounding the inlet. . . .") or one of those early anthropologist-travelers in the New World. For instance, this is essentially the tone in which Bernal Diaz records in his diary that Montezuma had reverted to his bad habit of eating little boys. It is the tone of the level-headed observer, someone who was *there* on this outrageous spot, and if still a little amazed by such remarkable beings is now fully accommodated to their actuality, if not converted to their philosophy. One even wonders if Frye does not see an inverse relation between what is sensible and what is civilized and that part of his wit rises from the disjunction between his own urbanity and his attraction to profane and unruly worlds.

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The point I wish to make is that in reading Frye I experience one of his own claims: that commentary about literature is an illustration of literature, both being "inherently and necessarily schematic" (StS, p. 176), and schematic, for Frye, refers simply to the formation of patterns.[4] I mean this in a somewhat different way and not by any means in a sense that would cover all criticism, even all "myth" criticism. It is a function of Frye's own performance and it begins in the fact that his project—at least in its anatomical quadrant—is not to interpret literature but to preserve it, in somewhat the same way that Noah preserved the animal kingdom: that is, by a systematic sampling of kinds. So the whole enterprise of a criticism of recurrence, in Frye's hands, involves a kind of narrational zoo-keeping, a continuation, rather than a transformation, of the species. Hence the "creative" aspect of Frye's work, noted even by his first critics: it is a re-patterning of other literature, and pattern, when it becomes the prevailing motif of any discourse, always produces a faintly aesthetic reaction. As we know, at the anagogic level, poetry and criticism are virtually undistinguishable; but moving out of that literary black hole, it is possible to see Frye's body of work as a great inverted poem which, in attempting to bring a structure to poetry, falls into poetry's bad habits, like the missionary who is reformed by the natives. It is a mimesis masquerading as a taxonomy; or (more realistically) a taxonomy that is best read metaphorically, or like a myth whose truth, Frye says, "is inside its structure, not outside" (GC, p. 46). Consider, for a moment, one of the most prominent characteristics of Frye's work: the virtual absence of references to his practicing colleagues. Certainly this has to do with the plain egotistic fact that Frye, like Richard II in the deposition scene, doesn't want to share his act with anyone who is still alive and uncanonized. But think what such quotation, sprinkled throughout his text ("as W. K. Wimsatt puts it," "as Meyer Abrams suggests," or "according to Wayne Booth") would do to the world he is conjuring. It would come apart and die, it would lose its natural immunity to the real; it would cease to be a world in itself and become an object of study, with an

[4] *Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism*, ed. by Murray Krieger (New York, 1966), p. 137.

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anthropologist behind every bush. Imagine encountering a sentence like this in a novel: "Herb looked deeply into Melody's eyes and saw there what Proust has aptly called the cruel opacity of desire." The poet, Sidney says (aptly), "citeth not authorities of other histories."[5] And to the extent that Frye sought collaboration from his fellow-critics, as the rest of us do, the whole centripetal principle at the base of his work would be reversed. He would become what many people regret he isn't: an orthodox literary historian.

It would be silly to carry this argument of Frye-as-poet much further because anybody can open his book and see he's a critic. I am simply trying, by injecting a kind of trace dye into his writing procedures, to re-enforce his claim that "there is no division, though there may be a distinction, between the creative power of shaping the form and the critical power of seeing the world it belongs to" (StS, p. 174). Perhaps the two powers come together most clearly in the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*. There is always the problem in theoretical writing of illustrating the premise being set forth, and this involves the writer in the mysterious gap between the objective and the poetic modes of understanding. This bears, of course, on de Man's distinction between the proposition and the particular, or, as Frye puts it in *The Critical Path*, meaning what one says and what one "shows forth" (p. 68). In fact, the discussion of this dilemma occurs in the context of Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*. Paragraph by paragraph, Sidney and Frye are very different writers, but they have a lot in common. For one thing, Sidney is fun to read for the same reasons that Frye is fun to read. He is never content with "affirming" a precept unless it has been animated by his wit and installed widely in nature. This is more than poetic ornament or persuasive back-up. Figuration, in Sidney, is almost an obsession; it has the kind of madcap momentum that reminds one of Gogol who will give you a metaphor to make something clear and then a metaphor to make the metaphor clear, and so on. Moreover, like Frye, Sidney loves jokes and, like Frye's jokes, they usually turn on the difference between the real and the conceptual. For example, in treating the virtues of Homer,

[5] *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. by J. A. Van Dorsten (London, 1966), p. 53.

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Sidney tells us that Alexander "received more bravery of mind by the pattern of Achilles than by hearing the definition of fortitude" (p. 57). This is straight Frye, and less so for an obvious word like "pattern" than for the dead phrase, "the definition of fortitude" which paints abstraction in its own colorlessness. In Frye colorless language is the necessary ground—a kind of flat wash—on which the figure is inscribed.

So there is a sense in which Sidney's little joke is a miniature of Frye's whole style. I spoke of there being two worlds in Frye. Obviously there is only one world, the verbal world itself, but it is founded on a tension that we might describe as a two-part verbal harmony. You can give the parts any number of names: proposition vs. particular, Frye's own *theoria* vs. *praxis*, *dianoia* vs. *mythos*, or (simply) Sidney's precept vs. example—in short, fortitude vs. Achilles. This could be said of all writers, I suppose, but it is especially evident in anatomists because their project is to exemplify a theory of classification. In any case, Frye's practice is distinctive because his most characteristic effects—the famous Frye sound—arise from the way in which the two voices produce the harmony.

Let me look at a simple example from *The Great Code*: "Job's 'he hangeth the earth upon nothing' is a bold metaphor, but one that does not get in the way of the future growth of astronomy" (p. 67). I will put this into its context in a moment, but it is important to see it as a single unit of expression, since, as Frye says, the quality of a style isn't found in the subject matter but in "the conception of the sentence" (AC, 267). This isn't a funny sentence, but it has an aphoristic effect that rests, like Sidney's Achilles joke, on the sudden connection of the vocabulary of biblical figuration and the vocabulary of scientific abstraction. It is roughly the verbal difference between *plowshare* and *agricultural implement.* Thus by putting "the future growth of astronomy"—a dead phrase if ever there was one—into a metaphorical relation with the bold image of God hanging the earth in vacant space, the words themselves, dead as they are, take on a figural value. They amuse because they are self-mimetic, standing in for the science that has replaced the myth. In the space of a sentence we go from one world to another. But now let

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us put the line in its context in order to illustrate how Frye's one-liners grow out of the antecedent text:

> Certain cosmological assumptions seem to be present [in the Bible] which are no longer with us, such as the assumption in Genesis and elsewhere of a sea of water above the heavens and a freshwater sea below the earth. But these are assumptions that remain metaphorical, on the same plane as the words "sunrise" and "sunset," not enforcing a belief any more than the words "sunrise" and "sunset" enforce or even imply a belief in a geocentric solar system. Job's "he hangeth the earth upon nothing" (26:7) is a bold metaphor, but one that does not get in the way of the future growth of astronomy.

This, of course, is a typical Frye procedure. His aphorisms hang, so to speak, from an idea, like the punch line of a joke. In this case the joke is about how a modern astronomer might phone his colleague one morning and say, "I'll see you at the observatory at sunset," when he really means something like "I'll see you at the observatory at earth-rise." Sunset has a very reliable meaning for an astronomer, as it does for all of us, but we forget that it is a figure of speech, and Frye is suggesting that we should extend the same semantic courtesy to "he hangeth the earth upon nothing," which never had anything to do with empirical fact. The passage, then, is about metaphorical truth vs. factual truth, and you will notice that it is itself a metaphorical construction. It makes its point by analogy, as Frye is elsewhere speaking analogically when he suggests, without a trace of the preacher, that God "may not be so much dead as entombed in a dead language" (GC, 18).

When I say that Frye is amusing I am not diminishing his seriousness in the least. Wit is a way of finding directions out by indirection, and laughter is the natural consequence of discovery, as Archimedes must have realized in his bathtub. So when I say that you can laugh, or at least smile, your way through Frye I am referring to the way in which the prose engages us in surprise through a certain tonal bearing, or distance, it keeps from its subject. Essentially, this is the distance of the storyteller who is pretending to be objective. To illustrate, take a discourse that begins, "A traveling salesman, having no place to spend the night, chanced to stop at a farm-

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house. . . ." This is what we can probably call writing, or speaking, at degree-zero. It is as flat as the earth, efficient, invisible, and serious—deadpan, as we say. It will tolerate no embellishment, such as "A traveling salesman, wearing a blue tweed suit and a tan raincoat, limped to the door of the farmhouse . . ."—unless, of course, these details have something to do with the archetypal farmer's daughter waiting upstairs. But it is an interesting kind of prose, not only for what it promises us in the way of surprise, but for the fact that it is at once so intimate and so pragmatic. Like a sex manual, it is all business and no emotion, though its business is precisely the production of a certain pleasure. This is Frye's tone, or the base of it. This is the rail on which the parade of figures passes. Its *melos* (as he would say) is a kind of plainsong: dry, underslung, unhurried, at times deliberately pedestrian, chary of adjectives (which tell far too much), laced on one side by Latin and Greek and on the other by street slang (and not a decibel's difference between them), and finally it is equidistant from the spiritual and the prurient, and equally at home in both. Since this latter Frye is not generally appreciated, I will permit myself one shady joke, though it comes from a well-stocked book euphemistically titled *The Secular Scripture*. This is Frye working right at home in what we might call the mode of High Vulgarity:

> In *Daphnis and Chloe* exposed infants are discovered and adopted by rustics, and the children grow up among the lambs and kids. . . . They get sexually interested in each other, mainly as a result of taking baths together, but nothing comes of it, and the illustrations supplied by the animals do not seem helpful. Daphnis is then taken firmly in hand by a married woman: she adds, however, a footnote on the difference between married women and virgins, and the thought of making his Chloe bleed throws Daphnis into such a panic that his lovemaking promptly goes back to square one. Eventually the plot thins, the secret of the two births is cleared up, Daphnis and Chloe are wedded, and, in the last sentence of the story, bedded. (p. 72)

The entire passage contains only five working adjectives and no metaphors, or at least obvious ones. But it is in the best tradition of *ut pictura poesis*. If you isolate one clause—I suggest "the illustrations supplied by the animals do not seem

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helpful"—and allow your mind to imagine the scene of these pastoral copulatives in action while the youngsters splash about in the tub, you see what Frye means in distinguishing what is said and what is "shown forth." "The pictured meaning," as Frye says elsewhere, "to some degree separates itself from the explicit statement" (CP, 68), which in this case, ostensibly, is Frye summarizing the plot of *Daphnis and Chloe.* But the real pictured meaning does not arise strictly from that plot. It arises rather from the refusal of the explicit meaning to be explicit. The whole passage is an exercise in mock-avoidance and innuendo. In consequence, it is itself not simply the synopsis of a typical romance but a comic extension of one. What makes it an extension—that is, a fiction in itself—is that the narrator displaces the story, putting it upstage of his own voyeuristic reconstruction of it, much as one might report to others what one sees through a keyhole, or in this instance the crotch of a nearby tree. Moreover, the language is highly *entre nous.* "Nothing comes" of the baths, he says, as if something should. The word "illustration" suggests that the animals were *trying* to be "helpful" by providing visual aids, like the Disney animals that are always helping Snow White around the cottage. We even get the impression that the narrator thinks early rutting is a "sensible" idea. Thus what is actually *said* in the passage—"this is what happens in *Daphnis and Chloe*"—gives way to Frye's performance as a connoisseur of what Hamlet called country matters.

But as we learn in the next paragraph, it is all part of the romantic deal. Against the quickening of the sexual instinct, manifested everywhere in pastoral nature, is the narrative necessity of the deferral of satisfaction until the end, literally until the last word, "bedded." And Frye has simply taken on the role of the *genius loci* of the typology, discreetly enacting for us its temptations and hesitations. And this is always his "pattern," as Sidney would say. Within the limits of his distinctive voice he has the chameleon's ability to become a native of the place, on the theory that if you're talking about heaven or hell you ought to go there yourself. So we don't simply get precept and example but *ethos* as well, by which I mean (in this context) a characterization, or what Burke would call the dancing of an attitude.

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When I spoke of Frye being equally at home in the prurient and the spiritual I meant simply that his vision of the world extends to these limits. Until I reread Frye in large chunks I hadn't realized how often he is drawn, literally, to anatomy and to the sexual and alimentary practices of both mortals and immortals. The books he admires most, if we can go by a slight lilt in his voice, are books that are realistic. Not naturalism, God knows, but what we might punningly call anatomical books, or comprehensive books. These would include Shakespeare, Rabelais, Swift, Joyce, and the Bible, though I don't mean to narrow the range of Frye's taste. What he calls "stupid realism" would be a book about nothing more than bodies trapped in social space. A book that is realistic, on the other hand, would be one that looks unblinkingly at "the dungeon of the body," as Sidney calls it, as the natural vessel of whatever soul we possess. Frye has a wonderful remark about Sir James Frazer, whom he likes a great deal. Frazer, he says, "never doubted that man had gone steadily up an escalator from ape-man through savagery to twentieth-century Cambridge" (CL, 91). This reminds you of those progressive charts you see on the nature programs of man beginning on all fours, gradually gaining his stride, and ending up in a business suit. But the question Frye is posing is whether evolution is really a progression. In his quaint nineteenth-century way, Frazer "never doubts" that it was, with the educated man at the summit of all life. Frye's way of saying he may be wrong is to put the progression virtually in the form of a tautology in which Cambridge may be regarded as what directly followed savagery.

One of Frye's finest moments in "body" language occurs in his discussion of prose rhythm, or *melos*, in *Anatomy of Criticism*. Eventually, he turns to one of his favorite writers, Robert Burton, from whom he learned more than a few tricks. Burton, Frye says,

> is said to have amused himself by going down to the Isis and listening to the bargemen swear. Perhaps his visits were professional, for the qualities of his style are essentially the qualities of good swearing; a swinging sense of rhythm, a love of invective and of catalogue, an unlimited vocabulary, a tendency to think in short accentual units, and an encyclopaedic knowledge of the two sub-

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> jects relevant to swearing, theology and personal hygiene. All of these except the last are musical characteristics. (p. 266)

Here, naturally, melos, or melody, passes into a demonstration of opsis, or "pictured meaning." What I see, and can almost smell, is a concrete universal in which bargemen are swearing and doing dockside things and at the same time unknowingly carrying out the esoteric rhythms of rhetoric, somewhat as the helpful animals in *Daphnis and Chloe* are carrying out the rhythms of procreation. But I believe Frye gets us down to the dock in order to spring the remarkable connection between swearing, on one hand, and theology and personal hygiene, on the other. Here the old adage that cleanliness (or uncleanliness) is next to godliness is given a fresh twist. You might see it simply as a clever aperçu except that, on reflection, you realize that swearing is almost always energized either by the sacred, which we are not supposed to name in vain, or by the body, which the sacred tells us we must keep covered up. To have found a conjunction of these two extremes (body and spirit, scatology and eschatology) in the art of swearing is perceptive enough. But to have put it in the further context of a discussion of prose style that—except for the "love of invective"—leans into Frye's own style suggests the possibility that the whole passage is a sort of authorial wink, like Hitchcock boarding the railway car with a bass fiddle in *Strangers on a Train*. I won't insist on this, except to say that it was Frye himself, not Burton, who made the connection between swearing, theology and personal hygiene, and it is consistent with what you find everywhere in Frye's work: a prose that is made, so to speak, of the matter of heaven and earth—"Luther-on-the-privy," to use his image (CP, 18)—one that takes its cadence from the interplay of the esoteric and "good swearing"—not cussing, of course, but a swinging sense of rhythm, a love of the catalogue, an unlimited vocabulary, and a tendency to move in and out of examples at the speed of metaphor. Frye's equivalent of the Isis, however, is the contemporary world in its more or less unconscious aspect: the worlds of corporate business, of the academic, of youth culture, and science—any world that thinks it is doing something for the first time. The idioms, bywords,

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and swear-words of these worlds regularly supply Frye with the rhythmic counterpoint to the Spenglerian "voice" in which he calmly pursues his patterns and precepts, and it is in the ventroloquism of these voices that we hear the flash of Frye's distinctive wit.

I concentrate on jokes and humor only because these things give us better access to the mind. Wit, especially in Frye's case, is not a means of sharpening meaning into aphorism, or an auxiliary feature of style, in the sense that Wimsatt, in his devastating critique, congratulates Frye for *at least* being funny; wit is integral to the process of rendering the world as Frye sees it; or, to put it another way, what we typically call a witty remark is simply the extroverted conclusion of a process of conjunction in which (usually) two things—like theology and personal hygiene—are brought together from a surprising distance and found to have a common property. This is at once the underlying principle of the figural interpretation of scripture and the art of the cartoon, which is a metaphorical way of swearing in public. The cartoon typically takes one form of behavior, say animal, and fuses it with another, human or political. And the great events of the Bible have always provided cartoonists with the patterns of contemporary human behavior. Thus, to take a recent example, Herblock, in his own secular way, is being quite figural when he has Pope John Paul, at the helm of the ark, hearing a complaint that "mom and the ewes . . . are getting tired of riding at the back of the boat." Wit, then, is not an adverb modifying a verb but the verb itself, the very motion of meaning as it gravitates toward the perception of a resemblance or a coincidence. The fact that wit is often not funny has more to do with the subject matter than with the structure of the thought. I suspect that we are still saying that poetry has two functions—to instruct and to delight—only because we have no single anagogic word for the wholesale thing poetry does for us. One proof of this is that if you try to separate what you have learned from the poem that has taught it to you, you end up with the contents of thematic literary criticism—such as the idea that in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* we learn that war and lechery have similar characteristics. What this really teaches us is that delight is

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simply the witty process by which the useful proposition is inscribed in an example.

This returns me to the problem raised by de Man, which we may put in the form of a question: is it possible, and if possible is it legitimate, to have a criticism of the example? That is to say, a criticism in which the proposition has a supporting role to the elucidation of the particular, or, even more boldly, in which the truth of the proposition is less important than its power of organization. To begin, I suggest that there are two characteristic ways of misreading Frye. On one hand, there are those who admire him so fiercely that they take his systems quite literally. This inevitably involves the attempt to assign a work to a certain mode or genre, or to a phase within a mode or genre; the more astute disciple will immediately see that a single work can, so to speak, be drawn and quartered and its motifs distributed, in a sort of sparagmos, around the various quadrants of the Frye circle, or that a whole work might simultaneously, by a trick of irony, occupy opposing categories. On the other hand, there are the more orderly readers, most of them historians, who *also* take the systems literally, or try to, and in failing see them as a methodological chaos in which one category contradicts another and all of them rest upon the soft sand of a myth, in the nasty sense of the word. These, of course, are Frye's critics, and they range from the friendly skepticism of an Abrams to the acid satire of a Wimsatt.

The gradual emergence of a deconstructive mentality has brought with it a new way of reading Frye, though one that was, as I've said, implicit in the first commentaries on the *Anatomy* and in the critiques of Welleck, Hartmann, Wimsatt, and Booth, all of whom saw that there was something creative, if not fictional, about Frye, and usually this implied that being creative meant being irresponsible, as in creative accounting. But more recently critics have managed to turn a corner by shifting the ground from a literal reading of Frye's systems to a closer reading of what Frye himself has said about them—that is, that they should be regarded more as scaffolding than as architecture. In fact, as Frye said in his response to Wimsatt, the *Anatomy* is not primarily systematic

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but schematic, and "the reason why it is schematic is that poetic thinking is schematic."[6] In other words, it is carefully patterned to produce *the effect* of a centripetal coherence. The best advocate for this new Frye I have read is Louis Mackey who, in his essay on Frye's theory of criticism (1981), invoked Derrida's concept of *differance*, by which every sign is "at once constructed and deconstructed," and *supplement*, by which every sign "both reveals and replaces the thing signified."[7] Mackey concludes that Frye's *Anatomy* is a somewhat deliberate—one can't be sure *how* deliberate—attempt to *become* the thing it is ostensibly about: the experience of experiencing literature. It does this not by using literary devices or sounding *like* literature but by giving literature the voice it does not have, very much as the artist gives nature the voice it does not have. As for Frye's claims about founding a science of criticism, Mackey says,

> Scientific criticism, as Frye imagines it, keeps turning back into art. And the relationship of the scheme of categories to the concrete literary detail is more like the relationship of a work of art to its sources than it is like the relationship of a hypothesis to the facts that suggest and confirm it. That criticism is proposed as a science is itself an artful gesture. (p. 451)

Let me offer an analogy that I hope will relate all of this to Frye's wit on the comic-visionary level and also to what I have been saying about speaking pictures. In thinking about Frye's verbal world I have often been reminded of the painter Pieter Bruegel. Frye's world scarcely looks like Bruegel's, either in color or in subject matter. But as artists in the tradition of anatomy, they have several things in common. Both of them render the world from the same perspective, usually a height that is roughly that of a movie crane, or that vantage from which the world best reveals both its details and its designs. Moreover, like Frye, Bruegel sees the world as being animated by its rituals—dancing, working, farming, drinking, hunting, and lovemaking—and these are almost always im-

[6] Murray Krieger, p. 137.
[7] Louis Mackey, "Anatomical Curiosities: Northrop Frye's Theory of Criticism," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, No. 23, Fall 1981, p. 451.

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bedded in the cycles of the seasons and of death and rebirth. But beyond even these cycles, the Bruegel world is unknowingly in the grip of what Auden, in his little poem about Bruegel, calls a disaster. The disaster is, of course, some great event from the Bible or from myth that is happening in sixteenth-century Flanders: an entire Flemish community festively turning out for the Crucifixion on Calvary, a corps of Dutch engineers and workers industriously building the Tower of Babel, a farmer plowing his field against the fall of Icarus, the death of Saul, the numbering at Bethlehem, the slaughter of the innocents, and the Dutch blind leading the Dutch blind. It is what Frye would call a massive displacement, as if the bed of history had somehow buckled and slid to the surface of the present. This is not simple anachronism, like a modern version of *Macbeth* set in Chicago. Like my family on picnic, it contains at once the original and its recurrence, and the overwhelming impression is the basically comic one of a civilization that, as Frye says, belongs to something before it is something (StS, 37). The comic element of course is that it does not know what that something is.

The Bruegel painting that will best make my analogy clear is, unfortunately, *The Tower of Babel*. This may seem an unflattering image to pose as an analogue to Frye's work. But Bruegel's version of the event is oddly skewed. It contains a double displacement. Not only is the project displaced to Bruegel's own world, but the painting is ambiguous about the significance of the tower. He probably sees it as an adventure in hubris, though this is not apparent from the painting itself. Moreover, from the standpoint of its visual impact, not to mention its feat of engineering, you have to think that Bruegel is saying something like, "No, they shouldn't have built it, but isn't it magnificent?" Or, as the Lord puts it in Genesis, "nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Gen. 11.6).

From the perspective of thematic *opsis*, then (if I can confuse categories), we may consider the Tower as an embodiment of Frye's idea of man's two worlds: the world he lives in and the world he tries to construct out of what that world offers him. As such, the Tower is the symbol, for better and worse, of the human imagination, or that "creative force in

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the mind [that] has produced everything that we call culture and civilization":

> It is the power of transforming a sub-human physical world into a world with a human shape and meaning, a world not of rocks and trees but of cities and gardens, not an environment but a home. The drive behind it we may call desire, a desire which has nothing to do with the biological needs and wants of psychological theory, but is rather the impulse toward what Aristotle calls *telos*, realizing the form that one potentially has. (FI, 152)

If this were the full sense of my analogy almost any construction of human imagination could have made the same point. The fascinating thing about the painting is essentially what fascinates me about Frye's various anatomies, and especially the big one that is sometimes likened to the Tower of Babel in quite another vein. When you look directly *at* any particular part of it—say, the man mounting the ladder between the third and fourth tier, or the carters hauling supplies from the dock—you get the effect of miniature within immensity: the mass dwarfs the detail but at the same time the mass is seen to be nothing but an infinity of details, each one articulated to the point of possessing its own autonomy. If Dutch painting at large is, as Roland Barthes says, "an art of the catalogue," the catalogue is here (and in Bruegel at large) haunted by its archetypal mass. Everything is itself and something it belongs to, at once intimate and objective, near-at-hand and far-off, and the eye moves ceaselessly back and forth between these reciprocating identities: the ascent depicted by the whole provokes the eye's corresponding descent to the part. For one could hardly say that the detail was there in order to *fill out* the mass, as it would be, for example, in naturalism; rather the mass is there to provide a context, if not an excuse, for the detail, to give the detail a wonder that would be lost if it were to constitute a painting in its own right, as in Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes*, or those cropped fragments of Bruegel paintings ("Detail from . . .") that appear so often in the illustrated books. In short, an anatomy, which is not so much an art of the catalogue as an art of the supplement, or the infinite deferral of primacy.

There is no single passage in Frye that can approximate

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the effect of the Tower of Babel, unless it is the entire *Anatomy of Criticism*, which one critic has likened to "a gigantic purple-martin house."[8] Like the Tower, the *Anatomy* is a mythological structure built according to the principles of mathematics and engineering. It is, one might say, imagination in the form of a science. It is internally coherent but empirically non-existent—meaning simply that it works, like any system of totemic classification, if you happen to share its combinational logic. But whether or not you find Frye's anatomy truthful to the organization of literature, you can't help reading it without suspecting that if it isn't true, something like it must be (as Frye has Socrates say in *The Great Code*, p. 26). The characteristics of literature are that it is endless, repetitive, but non-repeating, each work demonstrating, as Frye says, "the eternal newness of the same" (CP, 30). So the "scientific" problem that faced Frye might be stated as: how to make a containing structure rigid enough to offer a taxonomy, or a "helix" of levels and chambers, yet flexible enough to accommodate endless deferral and supplementation? Or: how to bring science and art together in a metaphorical relationship that might order the unorderable and make finite the infinite? In short, a model that has approximately the empirical validity of Niels Bohr's model of the atom as a miniature solar system. It is wrong, but it is a something we can hang a nothing on. In this vein, one is reminded of Borges' little piece on "The Library at Babel," which begins with an epigraph from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. The library consists of an infinite series of hexagonal rooms, any one of which may be said to be at the exact center of the sphere whose circumference (of course) is inaccessible. According to one theory, the narrator tells us, these hexagonal rooms "are a necessary form of absolute space or, at least, of our intuition of space."[9] In other words, without the rooms the absolute would have no dwelling place and we would end up with nothing but nothing, or (the same thing) nothing but every-

[8] Michael Dolzani, "The Infernal Method: Northrop Frye and Contemporary Criticism," in *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*, ed. by Eleanor Cook et al. (Toronto, 1983), p. 60.

[9] Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York, 1964), p. 79.

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thing. Or, as Frye puts the same idea in the *Anatomy*, "The child beginning geometry is presented with a dot and is told, first, that that is a point, and second, that it is not a point. He cannot advance until he accepts both statements at once" (AC, 351).

Let me illustrate the paradox of having it both ways in the intuitive spaces of Frye's work. The following remark concerns the nature of classifications and it is also a good joke: "But to make valid comparisons you have to know what your primary categories are. If you are studying natural history, no matter how fascinated you may be by anything that has eight legs, you just can't lump together an octopus and a spider and a string quartet" (CL, 89). What is the status of this remark? Can you put a spider, an octopus, and a string quartet together, or can't you? Here Frye *has*, by way of saying you *can't*. Is the particular, as de Man says, inscribed in the general, the general in the particular, or neither or both? Here, I suggest, we are in the realm of Magritte ("This is not a pipe") and the Epimenides paradox ("This sentence is false"). An even better example would be a silly parent who says to a child on shopping day, "Now please don't pester me for a hot fudge sundae smothered in whipped cream and sprinkled with peanuts." Here, "the picture meaning . . . separates itself from the explicit statement"; what is said and what is "shown forth" part company and the semantic negative becomes a pictorial positive. So the child advances to the shopping center by accepting "both statements at once," though it is very clear which is the more persuasive of the two. But to return to Frye's example: on logical grounds you can't make such a comparison because it makes no sense, and to this extent the proposition is clearly inscribed in the example by way of a satire on bad category-making. But on metaphorical ground, the statement invites a different kind of classification. Metaphor is precisely a license to confuse categories, or to tell falsehoods that are also truths on another level. In metaphor, two wrongs make a right: a string quartet is an eight-legged creature in the same sense that a fiddler crab is a musician, and with that in mind it would be difficult to look at one, at least from the waist down, and keep a straight face. Laughter, once again, is the flash of discovery,

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and discovery involves the putting together of heretofore unrelated things.

But quite apart from its categorical absurdity, the eight-legged trio involves the same operation that we find throughout Frye's anatomies; for it is neither more nor less valid than the six legs of satire or tragedy or the four seasonal legs of myth. What, for instance, is the categorical logic of saying that the first phase of tragedy emphasizes the dignity of the hero, the second his innocence and youth, the third his achievement, the fourth his hubris and fall, the fifth his lost direction, and the sixth his torture and mutilation? Who has decided this? But then, who can refute it? The whole thing is, like Pierre Menard's *Quixote*, "brazenly pragmatic," and in fact part of the reason you might be willing to accept these categories as true rests in the authority of the unraised voice that invokes them. Frye's stated logic, of course, is that the first three phases correspond to the first three phases of romance and the last three to the last three phases of irony (AC, 219). In short, it is a logic of the previous logic, of internal correspondence, and that is the logic of literature rather than science. I have no disagreement with these categories, which I find immensely useful in isolating certain features of tragedy, but I don't think they would cease to be coherent if Frye had given us others instead of these or had somehow carved the pie differently. Plainly this is not the way a scientific model is supposed to work. People have put Frye down about this and have pointed out that he himself has claimed that his system is logical on external grounds, but that is rather like complaining about a narrator who claims that the story he is telling us is true.

By no means am I inferring that Frye's modes and categories are open to suspicion. They are to his theory of literature what exposition is to a novel: the ground of its internal probability. What I am concerned with here is the sense in which a legitimate criticism can derive from artistic principles rather than scientific ones. Of course this is an idea we have already endorsed when we speak of the writing of Derrida as enacting his own metaphysics of deferral or Barthes's writing embodying his own erotics of reading. These are also forms of centripetal criticism, or criticisms of the example, in which

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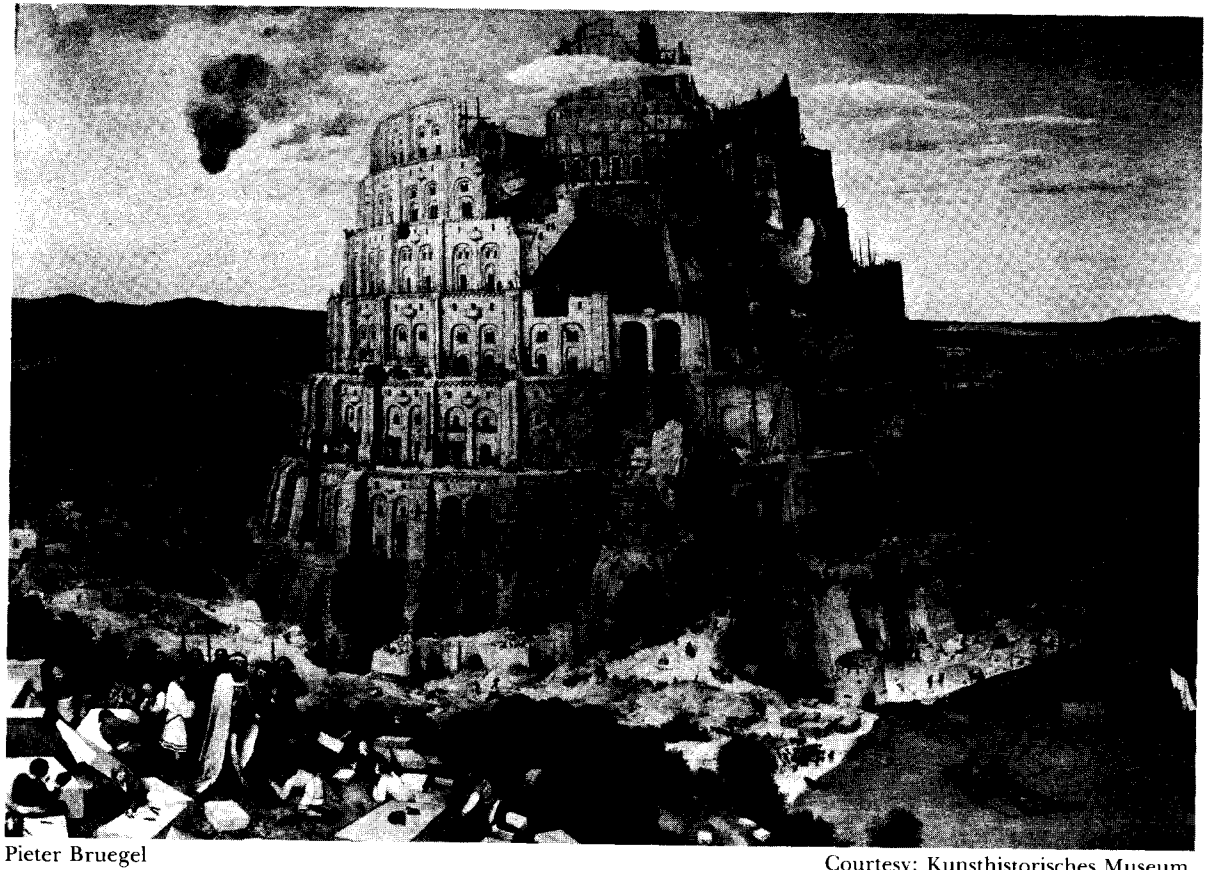

Pieter Bruegel
THE TOWER OF BABEL (1563)
Oil on wood

Courtesy: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

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what is produced is a mimesis of an imagination so dazzling that its performance validates its proposition. This is hardly to say that a poor proposition can be validated by any means. I refer only to the way in which certain propositions, like Bruegel's Tower or Frye's anatomy, become the organizing force of imaginative insight. As Frye has said, "the insights would not be there unless the structure were there too."[10]

Finally, of course, the structure cannot be separated from the insights. Frye's theory of criticism is not a proposition in itself, to be confirmed by example after example. It is rather part of the mimetic act of exemplification, one pole of a complex metaphor whose tenor is the experience of reading literature. That is: the reading experience may be said to involve a theoretical or a propositional element which is nothing less than our full cognitive processing of the "about-ness" of what we read. Among other things, this includes an awareness, however dim, of an unspeakable order inhering in literary praxis, each resemblance constituting the trace of a proposition we can never pin down. Each experience is brand new on the literal and descriptive levels of the text, but increasingly old and inarticulable as we move inward to the apocalyptic monad at the exact center of the literary universe—which, for both Frye and Borges, is the book we hold in our hands. The anatomical catalogue is the literary form that best encompasses this experience because, like the dictionary, it is a representation of verbal endlessness: every list is simply one *possible* list, every example just that—an example, and the categories themselves a set of proximate constants against which to plot the endless march of variants; for only by boundaries can one establish the phenomenon of amplitude, a principle we see most vividly illustrated in the soaring dungeons of Piranesi.

Frye locates the anatomy next to the novel for his own reasons and these have mainly to do with its digressive and satirical tendencies. My own would include a conception of the form as a system of metaphorical tenors (called categories), any one of which might contain an infinite number of images (called examples) which have the remarkable property of be-

[10] Murray Krieger, p. 144.

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ing both unique and interchangeable. Thus the anatomy is a kind of prisonhouse in which everything is free to become what it resembles. We tend to think of anatomy as if it were a mnemonic device, or a warehouse in which we can store works of literature and their parts on the theory that naming is a form of understanding. But its virtue is quite the reverse: it allows us to un-name things, or to see in them what has been obscured by familiarity, much as Proust is brought unexpectedly to a new view of his own garden by coming to it from a different "way." For when you put a string quartet next to an octopus and a spider (rather, say, than an octet and a sestet)—or, to take a serious example from *The Great Code*, when you put the Tower of Babel next to the hill of Jerusalem, the psalms of "ascent," Jacob's ladder, Dante's *Purgatorio*, and the winding staircases of Eliot, Yeats and Pound (p. 158)—you release all of these things from their bondage in received categories; and it is the oscillation of their belonging and not belonging to each other that produces the recognition we call wit. Wittily, you have said two things at once, a logical truth and a poetic truth, and they are mutually exclusive. But, as Niels Bohr says, there is no reason that profound truths can't contradict each other and remain truths in their own right. I would even argue that if Frye's "science" were airtight, true in the testable way that scientific theorems are supposed to be true, it would be false to our experience of literature.[11] That is, it could no longer account for the indeterminacy of literature itself or for the unique response that each reader brings to it.

[11] An excellent discussion of the various views of Frye's "scientific" shortcomings and of the aesthetic virtues of his work at large can be found in Robert D. Denham's *Northrop Frye and Critical Method* (University Park, Penna., 1978), especially pp. 191–232. I personally wish to thank Professor Denham for his bibliographical assistance in my own project.

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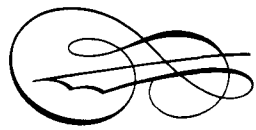

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Chanson Triste

The leaves on the lawn under the chestnut
are suddenly shocking
like something squandered.

His aching head
will rest in summer moonlight's lap
and the poems he'll read
will make her prima vera
high summer and autumn all at once.

In her melancholy eyes
he'll drink so many kisses
so many caresses
he might even be cured.

Or is he drinking with so much pleasure
the old illness
through the new kisses?

A piano made out of water
and clouds
and sunlight
is taking a golden glamour
into its greyness.

For years
one can rely on
an imaginary love.

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Other Life

She was a burning glass.
A little sun inside her had passed
through her from a hotter source.

And yet she was opaque.
Made from a childhood ache
that dark as particles could flame and shake.

She was dark, dark
to invisibility, a watermark
pressed in the paper of her book.

Her book was all she'd been,
child, mother, slut, queen,
and all she'd ever met or seen.

If he'd read her,
he'd have learned to dread her,
certainly never dared to kiss her or bed her.

First Kisses

The best kisses are the first.
First mother's kisses, and after that
the kisses in the Botanical Gardens
stolen among flowers.

Then there are the kisses when
you think you'll never be kissed again.

Kisses in foreign cities:
perhaps in a flat, perhaps in a rainy street,
panting because illicit.

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And then, late at night, comforting
someone in tears. Perhaps it's because
she's so hot with suffering,
or hasn't used her kissing mouth for almost years.
But probably not: she just has a talent
and like so many talents, it's
been buried.
Like her breasts
with their talent for being looked at and
looking back, it's a hidden address.

Not for everyday visit or caress.

Assisi and Back

It's the train from London to Assisi,
a sort of pilgrimage:
in the diner a dark girl
is staring: I feel my age.

It's the train back from Assisi, and the same
dark girl, suddenly aware.
So she smiles, sits close, intensely
close, and apologises for her stare.

I'd like to say, You're lovely but,
as I'm old enough to be
your dad, a man
must keep some dignity.

But on the platform at the end I give her
unexpectedly a kiss.
Her two friends shriek, and she
wanders off in, apparently, bliss.

It's pleasant enough

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to remember her now.
'I' seem young and naive—
she showing me how.

But why was I afraid of her?
And is it cowardice?
And the convergence? Is it
a hint from St Francis—

knowing so much more now
than under his vow,
united properly with poor Clare
up there?

In Spite of Everything

In spite of everything, I think
mostly of you, even though
this is the century of mass death,
gas chambers, squandering of resources
and pollution of the future.

Though our grandchildren curse us, as they will,
limping and tottering with the diseases
we dumped on them with war research and industry
and millions are lying belly-bloated in Africa,
I think mostly of you.

Though trees are dying, I think
mostly of you, almost all the time, wondering
if your smile is an acid rain, or if
you really love me, and I can't have enough
of your unattainable presence and perfume.

Most of all I long to know
what you're thinking really, and this

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obliterates the kneecaps blasted off in Ireland,
the profits from sophisticated weapons in the Middle East,
state terrorism daggered in idealism,
big dealers lobbying the government,
the investment of labour and wealth in futility,
the expense on defence on a planet
that's been indefensible ever since
the last of England were singing 'There'll always be
an England.'

Suffolk Evenings

I

Evening's always been a favourite time,
a lazy man's time, and autumn a favourite season,
for those who know they're living in failing light.
And failing light's internal. Sea and night
toil on but—it's more
of a vocation than a task. A ship snores
out of the scud, honking of risky work.
I turn to the fire and a different kind of dark.

An atmosphere close to pain: it implies
that all you've ever done, even your lies
and cruelties are invited as evening companions
to sit over tea or whisky and teach you sums:
equations that used to be unteachable, too
incalculable a calculus. On the pebbles, in a shampoo
of greening sea, bottle or log comes back in surges
of the selves that are always erasing us.

To the child who still hurts me it was hard to believe
in a time without canals: so like rivers:
no barges, but heavy with frogspawn and duckweed.
You dive off a lock into ink. From the balustraded

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balcony at the back of the house, you could see
a water-rat launch in a widening and widening V.
The navvies are all dead, and what they left is a clear
stretch of almost stillness that's always been there.

II

The tiny hands of rain on the window
are the rapping of a rainy Pennine childhood
in an eighteenth-century house full
of pre-technological people: a grandmother
born in the 1840s, an Aunt
already fifty, my mother forty,
I crawling by the big black fireplace
with the blackened copper kettle on the hob,
singing quietly by the flapping flame
as if we were wintered-in at Grasmere.
The huge kitchen's always dark,
lights always burning: the only window's benighted
by the high bank glooming the yard at the back.

My father's preparing himself a whisky
in the stained-glass bar, I'm playing
with the metal sheep on my farm, drawing up
the drawbridge on my flagged fort,
or reading *The World's Great Books in Outline*
with pictures of Dante and Beatrice, my mother's
name, and *A Midsummmer Night's Dream*:
Fuseli's vicious fairies: subfusc landscapes
with holes of light, no different from
the darkness under the table with the cat,
or the days of rain drenching the valleys,
or the watery window, where tiny hands are picking
and knocking and running down like tears.

III

A ship snores out of the scud,
honking of risky work.

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I turn to the fire and a different kind of dark.

Evening's when
thoughts come to the lip.
At night there's only a flashing from a lightship
just out of sight
whose name I've never found out.

A brass shoe dangles from my lamp,
bought the day before I went
to be tested for cancer: a gipsy called
and told me I'd live to be old.

On a hot sunny afternoon the door crashes open,
a guitar string snaps, the cat
sees something on the stair and screams.

A man on the beach, with a gold umbrella,
is tapping it like a white stick:
not only deafened but blinded by the sea.

For another the sea's his mother:
she's telling him something serious
that makes no sense
as if she were a piano
and he the audience.

IV

A white ferry strolls the horizon line:
a floating hotel, crystalline.
So much light and so much going.

Light as paper, the seagulls
shriek and dip,
by comparison grey and dirty
with their angels' wings.
The sunset seeks the ship.

The lightship
just over the horizon,

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invisible by day,
winks in the evening and, as I look,
signals knowingly back.

The other selves are creeping close tonight,
studying me: they made the choices
I didn't make. They lived promiscuously
with strangers for years and years,
becoming stranger to me,
with different wives and different lives,
and taking the faces of strangers into their own.

A ship snores out of the scud,
honking of risky work.

In the room there's an almost stillness
that has always been there
and tiny hands are picking at the window
and running down like tears.

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PHILIP DACEY

Thomas Eakins: The Secret Whitman Sitting

It was, of course, the natural thing to do,
so natural we only joked at first,
until one of us, I forget which, said, Why not?
Why not, indeed? Here was the body's poet,
singing electric, gross, mystical, nude,
and I had just shocked Philadelphia's
daughters with one swipe of a male loincloth,
meaning only to show a muscle, there,
but there went my post at the Academy.
Well, he was old. That's one reason why not.
The stroke left him half of what he was.
This would be no perfect body, the sort
he always sang of. And I could not lie,
he knew that. Nor would he want me to. I
knew that. Perhaps he simply trusted me:
he liked the portrait of him I had done,
and we'd discovered in the earlier sitting
our shared tastes in clothes, no airs, like workers',
and sunbathing, as Adam practiced it,
and contempt for all respectability.
Our differences—I the scientist of,
he the mystic of the body; I
seeing God nowhere, he seeing Him
everywhere—seemed more like complements than not,
each other's missing half. We got along.
But really I think it was none of these.
I think he was just Columbus to the last
and the prospect of sailing naked and shameless
onto the canvas, swelled by as much wind as
his years allowed, was his New World. "Brave ship!"

The problem was partly logistical:

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where to pose him. We needed light but did
his neighbors need Whitman naked at the window?
And then I did not want him to catch cold.
We settled on the space between his trunk
abrim with papers and the foot of his bed,
away from spying eyes, yet not too shadowed.
I told him I'd work fast. One sitting and
the rest from memory, studio work.
"Good," he said, "I'm not as tenoned and mortised
in granite as I used to be." Indeed:
he moved with such difficulty, I helped him
out of his robe and shawl-like blanket, feeling
the while like a nurse about to bathe a patient,
and he, as if he read my thought, said how
strangely he felt like a wounded veteran of
'65 and that I was he, Whitman
at his bedside best. The confusion passed,
but not some residue of feeling as I worked:
somehow he was wounded, though looking whole
enough, if not entirely comfortable, and somehow
I was to heal him, my paintbrush in my hand.

I thought he would lean back in the rocker,
but, no, he insisted on sitting up straight,
hands on knees, a natural spread to his legs,
arms stiff, props for his torso, head erect,
a very formal portrait—but for his dress—
a proper First Man posing in the garden
and mindless of his sex as were the boys
of theirs in my photos for *The Swimming Hole*—
if Whitman was ever mindless of anything.
He was giving me The Good Grey Poet down
to his last disguise. Even the face he showed
was itself a mask, formal, hieratic,
as if he meant to say, "Even while you should
think you caught me, behold, I have escaped you."
We talked at intervals—he enjoyed the odd
fact I had my own "gross," Doctor Gross,
whose clinic I had painted, earning cries
of "butchery" for my vision of surgery,

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and when I showed him what I'd done so far
he said, winking, "Let Gilchrist marry *that*!"—
and at intervals he rested, lying back,
re-covered, recovering, while I worked. It was
at one such time he fell into the sleep
from which I never awakened.
His head dropped forward
and I instantly feared the worst, but his beard's rise
and fall and rise again on his breast reassured me
and I was about to continue when something
stopped me: I had seen that posture before.
That slump. Almost as if I had created it.
And then I remembered: I had. It was my Christ's.
Twice-crucified. The critics bled him, too,
for being just a man, no god unless
all men and women were equally gods. Only
this Christ was old, as if he had been aging
up there on the cross all these years, hair
whitening, beard lengthening, in a life-long
crucifixion. I wanted to take him down.
But of course I couldn't. All I could do was look,
and look as I never had before, seeing
him naked as if for the first time. That his robe
had fallen open as he fell asleep,
revealing more than it hid, mattered little,
for he'd been shining in his skin for hours.
Rather, betrayed into sleep by that lot of him
now more weary than luscious, he'd sunk from his upright
human formality onto the tree
of his naked humanity, and my busy brush
had gone still long enough to let me see.
No longer the object of a painter's eye,
no longer the material for his own
artist's eye to shape into who he would be,
he was only himself, and I wanted to cry.
But didn't. I kept myself as composed as any
of my paintings, letting myself be moved
by what I saw, but never giving in.
Until I focussed on his old man's dugs,
or they focussed on me. Those centers burned me,

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like eyes themselves, pitiful blind eyes
that saw everything. I had the thought—
or it had me, seeming to pierce me from
all sides at once—"This is my father, this
is my mother," and with that thought sank
like Whitman, from my reserve into my weeping.
What the words meant I didn't know. I'd years
ago absorbed my own mother's death, and my dear
father was still with me, one of my best friends.
I couldn't say what need I grieved, if any,
or why those simple words had disarmed me so,
or why I took so long to regain my poise.
I only knew I would paint no more that day.
I packed up all I'd brought and left him there,
sleeping, with a note telling him I'd be back
and thanking him for all his precious time.
But before my affairs allowed me to return
to Mickle Street in Camden, he had died.

I didn't finish the painting. I had seen
the one I wanted, or the idea of it,
the one in which Whitman's nakedness doesn't
challenge us, like a hat worn indoors or out,
but enters us like words whispered at night,
some message about our secret parentage—
"I am your father, I am your mother"—
what a sleepy child might vaguely hear
and never—never fully—understand.
But that one, which I glimpsed at all only
by putting down my brush, I decided to keep
by letting it escape my framing of it.
I painted over the naked Whitman. If you
want him again, look for him under nothing
so divinely average as a bootsole
but under my portrait of His Eminence
Cardinal Turner, red-robed and little guessing
what or who it is supporting him.
I knew Whitman would appreciate the gesture,
it being such a barbaric thing to do.

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NEAL BOWERS

Shapes and Shadows

"Mr. Hirsch apparently mistook his jogging daughter for a deer."

Running at twilight, she saw the borders disappear.
The bare trees in the distance lost their definition,
blended with the sky, the lifting fields.
Even things close by gave up their separation,
hardly declared their identity at all.
A darker shade in the growing dark
could have been a cow, a bush, a man.
She herself felt different, quick along the gravel,
alert to twig-snap, the scent of other animals.
She saw the night rising out of everything like smoke,
the whole world smoldering, felt her own heart
burning, her blood rushing faster and hotter,
feet striking down as swift as hooves.
When her father fired from the vanished grove,
he shot a deer that somehow changed into his daughter
on the turning road, in the dying light.

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Insomnia

As victims at sea call out
at midnight when the ship goes down
and cling to anything that floats
but most to one another,
so a sleepless child will always wake someone
to end the loneliness,
calling—softly at first,
then louder—until a voice replies
from somewhere in the dark,
"Yes, I'm awake."
You would think dying, after all,
is not as bad as surviving alone,
islanded and whole,
the last of your kind.
Still, death is behind this restlessness.
It is the dark center
in the flashlight beam against the wall
as you get out of bed carefully
to avoid waking a husband or wife.
It is the shell-rush in the room.
That is why it does no good
to imagine others awake,
no good at all to think of half a globe
of people awake and in full sun,
and why we, seeing each other's light
across the darkened lawn, do not call,
having nothing to say.

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Kitchen Secrets

She once gave a persistent neighbor
her sweet sauce recipe
for angel food or pound cake
but left out several key ingredients,
the way the gods might grant eternal life
and omit youthfulness.
But I was still surprised
when those special little tarts
I loved so as a child
came from the oven dry
and tasteless as newsprint;
and though she swore
she'd told me everything,
I knew it wasn't true.
She said, "I guess no one
can cook like Mother,"
then mailed a dozen "lemon cups"
that even after three days in a truck
tasted better than my failed ones.

Because she cooks from memory alone
and never measures anything,
her movements are all mystery,
a lovely dance with signs
that translate into shortbread,
pudding, fragrant cakes,
something magic offered on a plate
to eat and become young again.

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Losing Paris

Another morning with no dew
and my neighbor says
she doesn't believe in Paris
because she's never been there.
It's the heat that makes her skeptical,
the long sauna of a night just passed,
and the sense of being in the middle
of everything—Iowa, America, the summer,
her life—in the middle of the griddle, she laughs.

This is my cue to say, like Bogart
to Bergman in *Casablanca*,
"We'll always have Paris";
but the line sounds more hollow than ever,
and I feel suddenly sad
for all the places left behind,
for the faces lost in the airport crowd,
the good-bye waves that can't be seen
from behind the oval window,
the town that vanishes.

So I mention the heat,
and we stand at the back yard fence
for a long time, holding onto this place.

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JANE BROX

Understanding the Time

He cannot even doubt.
—Pascal

Faith is just another thing
that's slipped away
like an old correspondent
or a girlish figure.

Years of belief come
to nothing, and you live
in slack time.

If there were a harassing angel
surely he'd appear now—
by all accounts this is the hour
for "certain strange things,"

yet, you wake to another clear,
secular day without
a chance in the world
to withstand God.

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Supper Time

A long slide off the bald heat
Of the day, then the earth cools
In a diminishing wind: still hour,
Still waters, fragrances and long-throated birds.

The potato farmer, his wife and daughter
Collapse into chairs on the back porch.
Their dark, half-lidded eyes stare down
Bottomland and backs gone out long ago.
Who here will muster the strength to begin
The evening? The thought of supper
Pesters them like fussy side-work.
They must just want to lie down.

But isn't this the hour
To be reckoned with, the time
When life becomes
What it is truly like?

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THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI

Goethe in English

On February 27, 1986, the *New York Review of Books* carried an insert in the personals from a "Gretchenesque Helena wishing for mature Goethean Faust." An ad on the facing page notified readers that for $8.95 they could order a custom T-shirt featuring Goethe's image in dark blue on tan or light blue on silver. Who says that Goethe isn't alive and well in the United States? And not just in the circles that read the literary reviews. Two years ago the Goethe Institute in Boston received a communication from Senator Bob Dole that began: "Dear Goethe: I'm delighted to be able to inform you that at the last membership meeting of the Republican Senatorial Inner Circle, I personally placed your name in nomination." When Goethe failed to respond, he received a follow-up letter including a note from President Reagan and the prospect of a reception hosted by Vice President Bush. The Republican boosters got it right about Goethe's political orientation: as a senior official in the grand duchy of Saxe-Weimar he did indeed become increasingly conservative in his views. But they overlooked the fact that Goethe was politically active in a principality that today constitutes part of the German Democratic Republic—not to mention the circumstance that he died over one hundred fifty years ago. Things must be rough on the election trail!

America has never known exactly what to make of Goethe. The uncertainty comes through in Emerson's essay in *Representative Men* (1850), where Goethe, in contrast to Shakespeare "The Poet," is introduced as "The Writer": "He has said the best things about nature that were ever said." A similar ambivalence is evident a century later in T. S. Eliot's speech on "Goethe as the Sage" (1955). Eliot chose to talk not about his poetry but about his "wisdom." Confessing that for fifteen years the copy of a well-known drawing of the elderly Goethe had decorated his mantelpiece, he discussed the quali-

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ties that Goethe shares with such masters as Dante and Shakespeare: abundance, amplitude, and unity. Eliot expressed doubts about the unity: he found Goethe's works "bewilderingly miscellaneous." But he was impressed by their sheer quantity and admired the incredible variety of Goethe's interests.

The American appreciation of Goethe will be enhanced by the projected twelve-volume edition of his works currently being published by Suhrkamp, the first reasonably complete and representative selection of Goethe in English since World War I. The handsomely produced volumes feature an acrylic cover design by Andy Warhol based on the familiar Tischbein portrait of Goethe in Campagna. (This painting lends itself easily to pop art: in a widely publicized ecological poster by Klaus Staech it is superimposed on a view of Frankfurt am Main, and the poet's dangling right leg has been eaten away by the pollution in his hometown river.)

Abundance, amplitude, and a bewildering miscellany are evident in Goethe's poetry, which covers an improbable three-quarters of a century from a New Year's poem that the eight-year-old addressed to his grandparents in 1757, to the couplet that the eighty-three-year-old inscribed in an album a few days before his death in 1832. During these seventy-five years Goethe produced hundreds of poems, ranging from the most fleeting occasional pieces to meditative poems of several hundred lines. (His poems fill thirteen hundred closely printed pages in one standard German edition.) He experimented with every form available in his day—from the alexandrines and Anacreontic verses fashionable in his youth, by way of the explosive free-rhythm "hymns" and folksongs of the *Sturm und Drang*, to the exotic meters and strophes that he favored later in his life: the hexameters, elegiac distichs, and iambic trimeter of classical antiquity; the sonnets, ottava rima, and terza rima of the Italian Renaissance; and forms inspired by the Persian and Chinese poetry that he admired in old age. His poems range in tone from the coarse, the scurrilous, even the scatological, to utterances of the most delicate sensibility and sublime reverence. He opened German literature of the late eighteenth century to a simple, supple power of expression that had not been heard since Martin Luther. He consulted scholars like Wilhelm von Humboldt and August

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Wilhelm Schlegel on fine points of metrics; yet he was capable of startlingly careless diction and rhymes comprehensible only in his local dialect.

It is this abundance that presents the first challenge to any translator. (One assiduous bibliographer has calculated that by 1924 over four thousand separate translations of poems by Goethe had been made in English.) The very act of selecting a hundred or so poems from this confusing plenitude demands a critical commitment. It seems fair to say that the *Selected Poems* edited by Christopher Middleton as the first volume of the new edition constitutes the best available collection of Goethe's poems in English and probably the best yet done.[1] Arranged in chronological sequence and with facing German text, it includes 107 poems from virtually every genre that Goethe touched, as well as twelve of the "Roman Elegies," nine "Venetian Epigrams," and a sampling of notes and drafts from the so-called paralipomena. Many of the selections are predictable, taken as they are from the canon made familiar by Schubert and Hugo Wolf. But Middleton has also included a number of poems less well-known in translation (if at all), which give his selection a personal touch.

The bawdy side, which the nineteenth century in its reverence for the lofty thinker tended to suppress, is represented by the early "Wedding Night," in which the Anacreontic conventions are ironically shattered by explicit sexual allusions, as well as the long-suppressed narrative "The Diary," which recounts in humorous detail an episode of impotence that prevented Goethe from consummating a dalliance with an inn maid while on a trip away from home. The elegy "Euphrosyne," inspired by the death of Goethe's theatrical protégée Christiane Neumann and culminating in a powerful statement on the permanence of art, demonstrates convincingly that German literature was capable of producing brilliant examples of the long poetic meditation that was the glory of English romanticism. And several other poems, including "Metamorphosis of Plants" and "Metamorphosis of Animals," display Goethe's skill at communicating scientific ideas in ac-

[1] GOETHE: Selected Poems, ed. by *Christopher Middleton*. Trans. by *Christopher Middleton, Michael Hamburger, David Luke, John Frederick Nims*, and *Vernon Watkins*. Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers. $29.95.

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cessible, colloquial language—that is, in raising didactic verse to the level of symbolic poetry.

Middleton himself provides well over half the translations; in addition, in several cases he has adapted the work of nineteenth-century translators in a nice gesture of collegial solidarity. He even ventures to compete with Longfellow by printing his own rendition of "Über allen Gipfeln" ("Another Night Song") side-by-side with Longfellow's version. Michael Hamburger contributes over twenty translations, in addition to his rendering of the "Roman Elegies." And several other translators are represented with major renditions.

In general, Middleton excels at poems that depend on witty allusion—e.g., the saucy monologue on art of "Amor as Landscape Painter"—and those in classical meters: his "Euphrosyne" refutes the widespread conviction that elegiac distichs cannot be rendered naturally in English. The last three couplets suggest the suppleness and variety of his lines:

Night more darkly presses around me, tumultuous waters
  Thunder now more loud, flanking the slippery path.
Stricken I am, with a sorrow unbearable, shocked with the pity,
  Weak, I lean on a rock, feeling the moss with a hand.
Misery sweeps the strings of my heart, a dark weeping
  Flows; and over the trees comes a first shimmer of dawn.

For the energy and idiomatic parlando of the early hymns, in contrast, Michael Hamburger is more satisfactory, as witness the powerful opening of the defiant monologue "Prometheus":

> Cover your heaven, Zeus,
> With cloudy vapors
> And like a boy
> Beheading thistles
> Practice on oaks and mountain peaks—
> Still you must leave
> My earth intact
> And my small hovel, which you did not build,
> And this my hearth
> Whose glowing heat
> You envy me.

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If Goethe's poetry displays abundance, amplitude, and a bewildering miscellany, Eliot's criteria are strikingly evident in *Faust*, whose 12,111 lines embrace the most poignant personal tragedy (the Gretchen story) and the lofty clash of cultures (Faust and Helena), the drama of man in nature as well as man in politics—and it does so in a two-part work that ranges in its formal aspects from the phantasy of Sanskrit theater ("Prelude on the Stage") and rigorous Greek tragedy (the third act of Part II) to the bawdiness of early modern puppet plays. Composed over a period of sixty years, it shifts in mood from the titanic energy of the young hotspur of *Sturm und Drang* to the experience and restraint of the mature man-of-the-world to the ironic wisdom of the octogenarian sage of Weimar. Yet despite its variety of form, of theme, of mood, *Faust* evinces an underlying unity of purpose and design that assures it a place alongside *The Divine Comedy* or *Don Quixote* as one of the utterly unique contributions to that *Weltliteratur* that Goethe proclaimed.

Despite its difficulties *Faust* has been translated into at least fifty languages, including classical Greek (!), Latin, Yiddish, Esperanto, and Urdu. No countries, however, have produced a longer or more prolific genealogy of translators than Britain and the United States, where between 1823 and 1949 no fewer than "Half a Hundred Thralls to *Faust*" (after the title of a book by Adolf Ingram Frantz) had published their efforts. And other versions have appeared steadily. It is safe to claim that no other work has been so frequently—or so resourcefully—rendered into English. While Randall Jarrell was working on his version from 1957 to 1964, he gloomily speculated that in the United States *Faust* could claim "few readers, no performers, and one worshipper"—himself. That may have been true twenty-five years ago. It hardly applies to a decade when there are at least twelve translations in print, not counting a Madcap Classic edition by George Haimsohn entitled *The Bedside Faust*; when a Faust Consortium, designating not the title of a fictional thriller but a number of sober Pennsylvania corporations, is sponsoring a series of four operas based on *Faust* (by Gounod, Berlioz, Boito, and Busoni) during the current four-year period; and when Goethe's work has become a staple on the reading list of Great Books courses all over the country.

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Faust presents the translator with an almost insuperable number of formal problems—not least the "Faust verse," a flexible line of two to six beats, arranged in rhyming couplets, that in its casual ease remains just on the formal side of free verse. But along with this basic "madrigal," which maintains a line of continuity from beginning to end, we find a variety of other metrical forms, ranging from iambic trimeter and alexandrines by way of blank verse and *Knittelvers* to choral odes, terza rima, ottava rima, ballads, and songs. The text constitutes an unparalleled test—quite unlike, say, the more unified challenge of Homer, Dante, or Rilke's sonnets—of the translator's ingenuity and versatility. The results range themselves accordingly across the spectrum from prose (Barker Fairley, 1970) to the meticulous reproduction of the original meters (Walter Arndt, 1976). Randall Jarrell chose an intermediate course. Convinced that prose is an inadequate medium for *Faust* and, at the same time, that the listener's ear has been affected by an age of prosiness, he put the first part of *Faust* into what he called "metered verse," a line that eschews rhyme but otherwise enables the translator to suggest the rhythm and infinite variety of Goethe's verse. This is the form that Stuart Atkins has chosen for his translation of the complete *Faust*—"to avoid the pitfalls of rhyme, the limitations of prose, and the losses attendant upon metrical transposition or homogenization."[2] The result works well for much of the text, notably the passages marked by a serious parlando, such as the great paean to nature in the scene entitled "Forest and Cave." Probably no one but the most dedicated syllable-counter will miss the rhyme scheme of the ottava rima of "Dedication" ("Once more you hover close, elusive shapes / my eyes but dimly glimpsed when I was young") or the strict iambic trimeter of Act III ("I, Helen, who am much admired, much berated, / come from the beach where only now we disembarked"). The line is especially effective in those passages whose poetic intensity raises them above prose and yet in which Goethe's own rhymes are so unobtrusive that they do not constrain the words:

[2] GOETHE: Faust I & II, ed. and trans. by *Stuart Atkins*. Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers. $32.00.

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O radiant moon for whom I have
so often, waking at this desk,
sat at midnight watching until
I saw you, melancholy friend, appear
above my books and paper—would that this
were the last time you gazed upon my grief!

For the *continuo* of the vast work, in short, the metered verse works well, enabling the reader to follow the mood, the language, the thought, the action smoothly and without the alienation of Goethe's varied forms. It provides, as it were, a thinking man's *Faust*.

But wherever the language moves up to pure song or down to earthy humor, it comes across as somewhat bland. Surely Gretchen at her spinning wheel, like lovesick teenagers in other countries and ages, is singing a rhyming song, and not:

My heart is heavy,
all peace is gone.
I'll never find it,
never, again.

At the other end of the scale the absence of rhyme often deprives Mephistopheles' words of their bantering wit and edge:

I like to see the Old Man now and then,
and take good care to keep on speaking terms.
It is quite decent of a mighty lord to chat
and be so human with the very devil.

Walter Kaufmann's translation of the same lines affords Mephisto with a much more effective exit at the end of the "Prologue in Heaven":

I like to see the Old Man now and then
And try to be not too uncivil.
It's charming in a noble squire when
He speaks humanely with the very Devil.

Stuart Atkins, one of our most learned Goethe scholars, has provided us with a thoughtful, reliable, and frequently mov-

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ing translation that adds a new dimension to the library of possibilities. Given the "bewilderingly miscellaneous" effect of *Faust*, it is inevitable that we need many versions. Any reader with a serious interest in Goethe's great lifework will want to experience it again through Atkins' words.

While Goethe's poems and *Faust* have long been accessible to the English-speaking audience in scores of versions, his writings on art and literature are less familiar. Indeed, many have never been translated into English before. (John Gage's *Goethe on Art*, 1980, while more inclusive, overlaps extensively with the selections here and does not include Goethe's literary criticism.) As a result, Volume 3 of the Collected Works will introduce many American readers to a side of Goethe previously unknown to them.[3] Unlike his friend Schiller, Goethe had little patience with aesthetic theory. Over a period of sixty years his statements on art and literature are almost inevitably inductive, moving from his consideration of a specific object or text to, at most, a tentative generalization or even a schematic representation of his conclusions. Thus the two powerful statements through which the *Sturm und Drang* signaled its liberation from the constraints of classical art and literature—"On German Architecture" (1772) and "Shakespeare: A Tribute" (1771)—begin with the young Goethe's epiphany in the face of Erwin von Steinbach's Gothic cathedral in Strasbourg and his similar shock of recognition upon first acquaintance with Shakespeare. Indeed, most of these writings, presented here in their entirety, are occasional pieces, stimulated by the review of a new work, the performance of a play, contemplation of a set of prints—of Sterne, Byron, Dante, Calderon; or Ruisdael, Rembrandt, a Greek grave near Cumae. The only fairly lengthy pieces are the appreciation of Winckelmann written for a volume of letters and essays (*Winckelmann and His Age*, 1805) that Goethe edited; and the essay on connoisseurship that he clothed in the form of an epistolary narrative ("The Collector and His Circle," 1799). But the profound ruminations on "Stages of Man's Mind" (1817)—which culminate in a diagram of four stages of human development from faith by way of the ideal and doubt to dissolution, and from imagination by way of

[3] GOETHE: Essays on Art and Literature, ed. by *John Gearey*. Trans. by *Ellen von Nardroff* and *Ernest H. von Nardroff*. Suhrkamp Publishers. $32.00.

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reason and intellect to sensuality—are produced in the course of a brief review of a scholarly monograph on ancient mythology.

"National literature is no longer of importance. It is the time for world literature," Goethe stated in 1827. The generous catholicity of his taste in literature and art is evident in this sensibly edited volume, which exemplifies Goethe's own belief in translation (from his 1828 review of Carlyle's *German Romance*): "For whatever one may say about the shortcomings of translations, they are and will remain most important and worthy undertakings in world communication." Goethe himself performed translations that fill a substantial volume, from his boyhood renditions of passages from the Latin classics and the Old Testament to the efforts of his later years to approach Theophrastus, Byron, Manzoni and other writers by way of his own translation. Among these two stand out: *Le Neveu de Rameau*, important in literary history because the world first became acquainted with Diderot's masterpiece in Goethe's version (1805) two decades before the French original was published; and the entirety of Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography.

In 1823, paraphrasing Cellini, Goethe observed: "When a man who believes he has accomplished something and lived a meaningful life reaches his fortieth year, he ought to begin the story of his life, record faithfully the eventful times of his youth, and then continue the account as appropriate." Though he believed that "all my published works are but fragments of one great confession," Goethe was well into his fifties before he took Cellini's advice and set out to transcribe the events of his life systematically. Shaken by serious bouts of illness and by the early death of Schiller in 1805, Goethe realized that, with the passing of his own parents, all living connection with his own past was rapidly vanishing. In 1809 he therefore began the autobiographical enterprise that occupied his thoughts for the remaining twenty years of his life.

The models available to Goethe were, besides Cellini's racy memoirs, Benjamin Franklin's matter-of-fact account of his life, which he read repeatedly; the "confessional" tradition of Augustine and Rousseau; and its eighteenth-century offshoot in the popular pietist autobiographies. However, none of these forms satisfactorily accommodated Goethe's mystical

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conception of his own life. In the poem "Primal Words. Orphic" (1817–18) he wrote:

> As stood the sun to the salute of planets
> Upon the day that gave you to the earth,
> You grew forthwith, and prospered, in your growing
> Heeded the law presiding at your birth.

Precisely this sense of astrological inevitability governs *Poetry and Truth*, which opens: "It was on the 28th of August, 1749, at the stroke of twelve noon, that I came into the world in Frankfurt on the Main. The constellation was auspicious: the Sun was in Virgo and at its culmination for the day. Jupiter and Venus looked amicably upon it, and Mercury was not hostile." In his autobiography he carefully set out to construct the *persona* that he intended to transmit to posterity. Goethe relied heavily upon external documents for the background that makes of his autobiography an incomparably rich social and cultural history of the quarter-century from his birth until his departure for Weimar in 1775. We are dealing here with no simple "confession" that devolves obsessively around the subject's youthful sins. Indeed, Goethe often backs away from intimate exposure just at the point when the reader most expects it. When he arrives at Wetzlar, where the events underlying *The Sorrows of Young Werther* took place, instead of depicting the love affair with Lotte Buff he spends several pages describing in detail the history of Roman law and the state of the Imperial Chancery of the Holy Roman Empire that he entered as a clerk.

Writing during the Napoleonic Wars, Goethe had a keen sense that the years of his youth took place during an era that had passed away with the French Revolution, and it was his intention to write the history of the era that had shaped him. His brilliant portrayal of his times—its texture, its beliefs, its characters—makes the story of his youth a great cultural document.

Because he had such a complex view of his own life, Goethe was unable to complete his autobiography in any straightforward fashion. He published the first three parts of *Poetry and Truth*, which carried the story down to 1775, in fairly rapid succession (1811, 1812, 1814); but the concluding fourth

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section, which depicted his love affair with Lili Schönemann, had to wait until 1832, when most of the participants were deceased. Unfortunately for posterity, the rest of his autobiography has come to us in a less systematic form. Skipping over the first ten years in Weimar, Goethe provided the next episode in his account (written in 1816–17) of his *Italian Journey* of 1786–88. A third installment (written in 1820–22) deals with the year 1792–93; and the remainder of his life is outlined sketchily in his so-called "Annals."

If *Poetry and Truth*, as a monument of autobiography, is one of Goethe's best-known works, the *Campaign in France 1792* and its companion piece, the *Siege of Mainz*, are almost totally unknown to non-specialists. Yet despite their titles these two works are anything but dry military memoirs. To be sure, Goethe's account of the ill-fated campaign of the German Allies under the Duke of Brunswick against the French in August and September of 1792 is so graphically detailed that it remains until today one of the principal sources for historians of the Revolutionary Wars. Goethe appreciated the significance of this first decisive defeat of the Austro-Prussian armies by the French forces. On the evening following the Battle of Valmy, he predicted: "From this time and place a new epoch is beginning, and you will be able to say that you were there."

The fall campaign and the German siege of French-occupied Mainz the following summer provide the framework for a critical year in Goethe's own life. A trip to visit friends near Düsseldorf and the winter at home in Weimar served to highlight his increasing alienation—from the friends of his youth as well as the society surrounding him at the court of Weimar. One welcomes the inclusion of these revealing pieces—translated for the first time since 1849—in the edition of Goethe's autobiographical writings.[4]

Inevitably, a phenomenon that obsessed Goethe as powerfully as the French Revolution and its turmoils manifested itself in his literary works as well. Conservative by disposition and opposed to violent revolutionary change in nature or in human affairs, Goethe observed with concern the conse-

[4] GOETHE: From My Life: Poetry and Truth; Campaign in France 1792; Siege of Mainz, ed. by *Thomas P. Saine* and *Jeffrey L. Sammons*. Trans. by *Robert R. Heitner* and *Thomas P. Saine*. Suhrkamp Publishers. 2 vols. $69.00.

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quences of the fateful reversal at Valmy—including the waves of émigrés who flooded across the Rhine in the face of advancing Revolutionary forces. He came to feel that only the Homeric epic was adequate to deal with this contemporary phenomenon, which he treated in nine cantos of dactyllic hexameters in *Hermann and Dorothea* (1797).[5] In the marriage of the innkeeper's son and the lovely émigrée Goethe hopefully anticipated a resolution of the present conflict in the emerging bourgeois society. In keeping with the conventions of the epic Goethe tended to idealize the émigrés, whose arrogance and unwillingness to submit to local authority in reality often antagonized the populations of the eastern banks of the Rhine. And he viewed the complacent citizens of small-town Germany with considerable irony. Yet he believed that it was not from the political turmoil of the great world but from the order and tranquility of the small one that Europe's future would emerge.

"Then let our bond, Dorothea, be so much the firmer in all this
General chaos; let us endure and continue and hold fast
To each other, and fast to the fine possessions we have here.
For in an unstable time, if a man himself is unstable
He will increase the unrest and spread it further and further;
But he who firmly holds to his purpose gives shape to his whole world."

If Goethe dealt with the political world directly in his autobiographical writings and in *Hermann and Dorothea*, he had already come to grips with the same forces metaphorically in the dramatic trilogy that perhaps best exemplifies the "classical" Goethe of Weimar. The three plays display conspicuous differences of material and theme. *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1787), based on Greek myth, is the finest exemplification of that "humane" quality to which Weimar classicism aspired. *Torqua-*

[5] GOETHE: Verse Plays and Epic, ed. by *Cyrus Hamlin* and *Frank Ryder*. Trans. by *Michael Hamburger, Hunter Hannum,* and *David Luke*. Suhrkamp Publishers. $32.50.

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to Tasso (1790) takes its material from the Italian Renaissance to represent the tragedy of the modern poet riven by what Goethe termed the "disproportion between talent and life." And *The Natural Daughter* (1803), which is here made available in English for the first time, uses the plot of an eighteenth-century *mémoire* to dramatize the destiny of the individual in the face of political power.

Yet the three plays are linked by more than their blank verse. For they betray an underlying paradigm that expresses Goethe's concerns about the threatening forces of history. Each play opens with the depiction of a sanctuary—the temple of Diana in Tauris, a summer palace in Ferrara, and a secluded estate in an unnamed duchy—untouched by the movement of history, where a virginal figure—Iphigenia, Leonora of Este, and Eugenia—preserves pure and timeless being. This sanctuary is imperiled when the sacral virgin is tempted by circumstances to violate its absolute principles in order to achieve temporal goals. But despite the efforts of her tempters the sacral virgin reaffirms the values of the sanctuary and resolves to preserve them for a future that she envisions beyond the present historical turmoil. In their efforts to preserve the order of their respective realms Iphigenia, Leonora, and Eugenia exemplify Goethe's hope that the permanent values of classical humanity could be preserved in Weimar despite the ravages of revolution and war threatening on every side.

If Goethe's verse plays and epics strike readers today as somewhat remote, we should be grateful to have them available in felicitous new translations. Anyone who troubles to penetrate the serene surface of these glorious works will find underlying them the tormented ambivalence of the author, who saw during the revolutionary decade the values of his eighteenth-century past being swept away, to be replaced by the bourgeois humanism of the nineteenth century. These volumes, well edited and capably translated, may not help the Republicans to determine "Goethe's" voting preferences, but they will certainly lend a substance to his image that is lacking in the customized T-shirts advertised in our literary magazines. One looks forward to the remaining six volumes.

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RICHARD HORNBY

New Life on Broadway

M. Butterfly is an odd play based on a real-life incident: a French diplomat was recently convicted of passing secrets to the Chinese government via his mistress of twenty years, a performer of Beijing Opera. At the trial, the mistress turned out to be a man, which seemed to surprise the diplomat as much as it did the public.

I suspect that the diplomat was simply a homosexual, who had naturally preferred to have people think he had a mistress rather than a male lover, but the Asian-American playwright David Henry Hwang has taken his asseverations seriously, and written a play in which the diplomat, named Rene Gallimard, is characterized as an obsessive romantic seeking the perfect woman, an Oriental *femme idéale* who will be the Madame Butterfly to his own Pinkerton. (The *M.* of the play's title stands for Monsieur, something the New York media never did figure out.)

At the trial, "Butterfly," now finally dressed as a man, is naturally asked how he was able to pull off such a stunt for such a long time. He replies that he characterized himself as shy (which Gallimard adored), never undressing in the man's presence; that in their sexual relations he "did most of the work"; and, most important, he was able to fool Gallimard because the man wanted to be fooled, his romanticism about women and the Orient causing him to live in a world of fantasy in which reality was simply rejected. It all seems a bit far-fetched, but then again, drama is notorious for requiring major suspensions of disbelief, and the playwright's premise here provides an interesting vehicle for exploring our culture's attitudes toward gender and race.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French structuralist anthropologist, has pointed out that all cultures tend to view the world through polar oppositions, which they parallel with one another like a mathematical proportion (A is to B as C is to D, as E is to F, etc.). With regard to gender, only a fanatical feminist would declare that there is no difference at all between men and women; where our culture shows a weakness is not in recognizing an obvious biological distinction, but in paralleling that male-female opposition with others, so that man is to woman as reason is to emotion, as active is to passive, as physical is to spiritual, and so on. The thrust of Hwang's play is to expose the speciousness of such parallelisms, especially the one that sees Orientals as "feminine" (hence weak, requiring domination, but also inscrutably wise, intuitive, and mysterious), in contrast to our

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"masculine" selves. As a metaphor for our self-delusions about Orientals, Gallimard's odd sexual passion is deftly effective. Certainly the ways in which Americans have fooled themselves in the past about the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Vietnamese are no less ludicrous than this diplomat's *idée fixe.*

John Lithgow gave one of his typically solid performances as Gallimard, but B. D. Wong as the mistress was the more amazing. I have seen Beijing Opera performed, and can attest that the male performers of women are indeed beautiful and feminine, but that is in a highly stylized form, and in another language as well. Wong was convincing even in the relatively naturalistic scenes with Gallimard, feminine without being effeminate, demure yet lively, with a gentle alto voice that could pass for a woman's anywhere. He spoke a pure, clear English (the actor is another Asian-American), which meant that the audience would have picked up the slightest masculine note, but there were none. We saw the character only as Gallimard did, beautiful, alluring, delitescent. Then, when Wong took off his wig, makeup, and clothes on stage near the end of the play for the trial, revealing a surprisingly muscular body and very ordinary male face, and then dressed again in a man's suit, it seemed like some kind of magic trick done with mirrors. As Gallimard put it, he had turned into the kind of guy "who hangs around discos wearing a medallion and smelling of garlic." It was a sharp reminder of how so many of the differences we see between male and female are cultural rather than biological. This does not make the differences trivial—just the opposite!—but it does in turn demonstrate the awesome power that culture holds over us, with a subtle set of constraints that are rarely even discernible.

Eiko Ishioka's set and costumes for *M. Butterfly* were literally stunning. As we entered the theatre, my companion noticed a friend of hers in the audience and tried to introduce me to him, but I was so dazzled by the setting (the play was performed without an act curtain, almost standard practice these days) that I am afraid that I responded with all the graciousness of a drug addict. In front of an intense, Chinese red backdrop, a curving ramp of bleached white maple swept down from high upstage on the audience's right, all the way across the stage and then back to the stage floor at center. It surrounded a black platform, on which most of the scenes were performed; the platform, framed by Chinese screens, held austere red furniture and, from time to time, huge Oriental flower arrangements. After the play began, "Butterfly" made her initial entrance down the ramp, with delicate, tiny steps, dressed in a magnificent flowered yellow dress, which contrasted with the gray and black costumes of the Westerners. From time to time, huge silken drops flew in, with beautiful flowery designs or, in scenes taking place during the Cultural Revolution, with an idealized picture of some Red Guards.

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It was all the kind of design that is sure to win awards, and was certainly beautiful on its own terms, but ultimately it overwhelmed the play, which is wry and philosophical rather than high-flown. Ishioka is a Japanese artist, whose background is in various areas of design, including books, posters, television commercials, and fashion shows, but with little experience in theatre. Her sets and costumes here would have been more suited to an actual production of *Madame Butterfly* than to a play that constantly undercuts that opera, mocking our ideals about women and the Orient. For years, I have been lamenting the decline of good theatre on Broadway, and now that there has finally been a play there that is interesting and unusual, I am ungratefully complaining, but in the end I felt that the piece would have been better served in a small off-Broadway house, with less opulence and more contrasts in its settings.

Star-studded Shakespeare is now in vogue in New York. Joseph Papp's productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Julius Caesar* (reviewed here in the last issue), with the likes of Elizabeth McGovern, Al Pacino, and Martin Sheen, were followed by a Broadway production of *Macbeth* with Christopher Plummer and Glenda Jackson. In general, the critics were made uneasy by the very thought of big names in Shakespeare, and seemed to have written their reviews long before the plays opened.

With regard to *Macbeth*, we heard incessantly that the production was doomed to failure, first because the play (which actors are not even supposed to mention by name, referring to it only as "the Scottish play") is notorious for bringing bad luck, and second because this incarnation had gone through three directors and two designers before arriving in New York. In fact, *Macbeth*, like *Midsummer* and *Caesar*, was good, solid, ungimmicked Shakespeare, not without flaws (what production is?), but certainly a welcome arrival, much preferable to the self-conscious "concept" productions that are the norm today, in which the play is ruthlessly subordinated to a director's restless genius.

I have heard various theories as to why *Macbeth* is unlucky, the most charming of which is the notion that the witches' chants are actual incantations for calling up the Devil, who arrives to work mischief on the cast. It is certainly true that there have been many deaths, injuries, and other mishaps during productions of the play; the most recent involved the suicide of a singing coach, who jumped off the top balcony at the Met during a performance of Verdi's operatic version. But I suspect that the real reason for the play's reputation is that it is just plain difficult to perform. It is hard to get the witches right; they can easily come off as a bit silly, but if underplayed (as they were here) they will seem tame and unthreatening. Macbeth, one of the most introspective of Shakespeare's heroes, must also seem to be a great warrior, who "carved out his passage" to the merciless rebel Macdonwald and "unseamed him from

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the nave to the chaps." (Hamlet only has to be a good fencer, which is far easier.) Finally, Lady Macbeth is one of the most difficult roles in all drama, possessed by evil spirits at the beginning, yet remorseful at the end, a schemer, lover, temptress, mother, demon, and ultimately, in the sleepwalking scene, a frightened little girl.

Given all these problems, critics might well judge a production by its strengths rather than its weaknesses. Plummer was a solid Macbeth; he has a relaxed, pensive, yet strong face that has actually improved with age, now looking like chiseled granite. Small reactions, like a tiny, exhausted smile when he heard Macduff explain how he was indeed not of woman born, read large to the audience. His body is suitably sturdy and muscular; he injured his leg in rehearsal (that curse again?), however, actually rehearsing for a while in a wheelchair, and was still moving a bit stiffly in performance, but that just added to the impression of a battle-scarred warrior. (It did mean, however, that the fight with Macduff had to be staged rather perfunctorily.) His voice is a bit light for the role, but well trained and resonant; he spoke the verse both musically and meaningfully, with excellent diction. If he did not get the wild moments, like the terror at seeing Banquo's ghost, as forcefully as Ian McKellan did ten years ago in the part, he was better than McKellan in his overall clarity, strong physical presence, and sense of inner depth.

Glenda Jackson, one of the most powerful actresses in the world, would seem ideally suited to the part of Lady Macbeth. She certainly has the voice for it, and, enhanced by Patricia Zipprodt's striking costume, a long red robe that showed off her lean, athletic body, she was wonderfully physical; when she was still, she was like a female panther ready to spring, and when she moved, she was as sparing and elastic as a Martha Graham dancer, even incorporating a few Graham-like contractions into her performance. But, as when Jackson played Hedda Gabler some years ago, another example of what should have been perfect casting, I felt that she (like Plummer) was ultimately too restrained, too polished. I certainly would not have wanted the opposite extreme, with a lot of slobbering and raging, nor the kind of internalized, dazed performance that an American actress trained in our traditional, Actors Studio "Method" might give. Nevertheless, there are moments in the part, as in the "Come you spirits" speech, when Lady Macbeth is calling upon demons to possess her in a hideously sexual way, or when, literally drunk, she is orchestrating the murder of Duncan, when the actress ought to be transfigured, and Jackson wasn't. For some reason, when on stage she seems to hold back from the moments of wildness that have punctuated her best screen roles, as if she felt that the theatre required her to maintain decorum. As Lady Macbeth, she was perfect ninety-five percent of the time, and the other five percent—too perfect.

Plummer and Jackson were supported by a strong cast. Two were from Plummer's native Canada: Jack Gwillim was dignified and

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well-spoken as Duncan, Alan Scarfe appropriately sturdy and stolid as Macduff, a good match for Plummer despite Scarfe's being the fifth actor in the part in this revolving-door production! Finally, Randle Mell deserves special mention for actually pulling off the role of Malcolm, the most thankless role in Shakespeare. Mell not only managed to say all those lines about being "yet unknown to woman," never having told a lie, etc., without seeming like a sap, he actually made the character seem vigorous and admirable.

Zipprodt's costumes were consistently effective. With their simple lines, and subdued earth colors, they draped beautifully, enhancing movements in what is a very active play. Daphne Dare's settings, inspired by the designs of Gordon Craig, and by the drawing of the interior of the Swan Theatre from Shakespeare's day, employed two tall pillars at either side of a hexagonal platform, with three sets of four stairs leading down to the stage floor proper. Various furniture pieces could be added or removed quickly, so that the action flowed smoothly, with the differing levels and interesting angles creating good lines of movement, and meaningful groupings. The finish was of gray stained wood, which gave an austere, archaic, though ultimately timeless quality to the decor.

New York theatre critics have evolved an *auteur* theory of directing the classics, denouncing multiple direction as bad by definition. In fact, having several directors for a play is common in Europe (though usually simultaneously rather than serially!), and the "need" for a striking interpretation from a genius director would have seemed a strange idea to Shakespeare himself. (Note the straightforward, workmanlike way that Peter Quince directs *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *Midsummer*, with no guff about his "concept.") Perhaps a strong individual could have coaxed out ultimately better performances from Jackson and Plummer, but such a director might also have added personal touches that would have muddied up the action. This production, with its Canadian and British actors, reminded me of a typical Shakespeare production at the Canadian Stratford in Ontario—unadventuresome, but brisk, unpretentious, and clear.

Good heavens, a David Mamet play with a plot! Whatever are we coming to? True, *Speed-the-Plow*[1] is short, unelaborated, and obvious, but it definitely has a beginning, middle, and end.

In the first act, two Hollywood film producers who have known each other for a long time are discussing a project involving a famous director and a schlock script. One of the producers, Bobby Gould, has become rich and powerful enough to make any film he wants. The other, Charlie Fox, has been much less successful, but

[1] The title is based on a supposed medieval blessing, "God speed the plow." I don't recall it in medieval literature, but am willing to grant its use, though not with the hyphens, which did not yet exist. Mamet uses the phrase, not mentioned in the play itself, apparently because of its vaguely sexual connotation.

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hopes to make his fortune by associating with his old friend on this film. In the meantime, Charlie notes that Bobby has acquired an attractive secretary, and bets that Bobby cannot seduce her. Bobby invites her into the office and, to get the ball rolling, asks her to evaluate a dreadful end-of-the-world ecology novel by a "sissy Eastern writer" that has been submitted to him for consideration.

Act II takes place at Bobby's home where the seduction is to take place. Karen, the secretary, waxes enthusiastic about the novel, babbling like a sixties hippy about radiation, the end of the world, the need for companionship and love and nature and true feelings. Trite though she sounds, her pleas actually seem to affect the hard-boiled producer.

In Act III, back at the office the next morning, it appears that the seduction has actually taken place, though who seduced whom is less clear. Charlie is furious to learn that Bobby is no longer interested in the original project, and is now planning to make the ecology film instead. They fight. Karen comes in and Charlie confronts her, accusing her of having manipulated Bobby to gain power and influence. Bobby, instantly convinced that this is the case, drops her and the ecology fim. End of play.

The dialogue throughout *Speed-the-Plow* is a satire of Hollywood talk, the sort of thing that has been done many times before by writers better than Mamet, whose main originality here is in the sheer number of times he can use the familiar short word for the act of love in unloving contexts. The staccato lines do have a mesmerizing quality, especially given the rapid, manic delivery of Joe Mantegna as Bobby and Ron Silver as Charlie, who were major factors in making the play bearable. Silver, who won a Tony Award for his performance, is a good but narrow actor, limited to zany urban Jewish characters; he has a good deal of stage charm, and superb comic timing, so that inanities like "Why should nickels be bigger than dimes? Because that's the way it is!" come off as hilarious.

Another reason for the play's success, at least at the box office, is that the role of Karen was played by a rock music star named Madonna, whose fans mobbed the theatre. Her performance was unexceptional; deprived of an echo chamber, she has little voice, and her features are small and relatively inexpressive, but she is relaxed and sincere on stage, and hence easy to watch. She lacked the driving energy of the men, however, was not nearly sexy enough for the role, and needed more naive eagerness to convince me that she could have convinced Bobby about the novel. Casting her was an entirely commercial decision; there are a thousand young actresses in New York who would have been better.

Despite its three acts, *Speed-the-Plow* takes only about ninety minutes to perform. Many audience members stayed in their seats at the end, thinking vaguely that there must have been more to it. There wasn't. Lively if somewhat predictable characters are its sole

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virtue; it has limited scope, few incidents, little complication, no reversals other than Bobby's two quick changes of mind, and a hasty, perfunctory resolution. By comparison with August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, it is not only poor, it does not even seem to be a play at all.

Joe Turner's Come and Gone was running on Broadway this past spring, simultaneously with Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fences* from last year, which I reviewed in *The Hudson Review* last fall. This is another sign of Broadway's renewed vitality, and of Wilson's own stature as a playwright. *Joe Turner* is sometimes not so well constructed as *Fences*, and its characters are less complex, but it is even more powerful. No other American playwright has such a strong sense of history as Wilson; this play is set in Pittsburgh in 1911, with historical details about black life at that time and place that are accurate, telling, and atmospheric.

Fences was a play about separation; *Joe Turner* is a play about reunion. Several of its characters are seeking lost relatives or former companions in this turbulent low point in black history, when personal relationships seem the only refuge from a migratory, oppressed existence. The title refers to a W.C. Handy blues song, which in turn refers to an actual historical figure, Joe Turney, who owned a vast plantation in Tennessee around the turn of the century. Needing free labor, he would kidnap black men, put them on a chain gang, and force them to work as slaves, some forty years after emancipation. The central figure in this play, Herald Loomis, returns from years of this enslavement, desperately seeking his wife. A strange, ominous character (played by Delroy Lindo with forcible presence and terrifying energy), he arrives with his daughter at the rooming house where the play is set. There are subplots involving a number of the other lodgers, all united by the common theme of the need for personal connection, but all the characters are affected in one way or another by Loomis' obsessive mission. In the final, overwhelming scene, he at last faces his long-lost wife; their confrontation resonates with love, bitterness, religious imagery, social criticism, tragedy.

Superbly acted by a well-balanced ensemble, gracefully directed by Lloyd Richards of the Yale Drama School (who also directed *Fences*), the play is unbelievably poignant—the first I have seen in a long time at which audience members, including me, openly wept—yet, like all of Wilson's work, also full of humor and detached social observation. Wilson makes trendy white playwrights like Mamet look paltry; he is now the only American playwright of his generation who can be mentioned in the same breath as O'Neill, Williams, or Miller, our best.

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BERT CARDULLO

Artists as Children

LOUIS MALLE'S LATEST FILM, *Au revoir les enfants* (*Goodbye, Children*), is better than his other one about German-occupied France, *Lacombe Lucien* (1973): its Nazis are not all depraved or bestial, and, as a memoir, it is more modest in scope than the earlier film. Malle gives himself the name Julien Quentin in this work about his experience at a Catholic boarding school near Fontainebleau during the winter of 1943–1944. The twelve-year-old Julien has been sent there, along with his older brother François, less for his own protection, it seems, than because his wealthy mother—estranged from his father—wants to enjoy whatever freedom she has left in occupied Paris. We know that Julien is a mama's boy from the opening scene, during which the camera comes up close on him and the beautiful Madame Quentin as he is about to board a train for Fontainebleau. It is the end of Christmas vacation and Julien doesn't want to return to school; his mother affectionately consoles him while he fumes and pouts. As the train leaves, he's framed alone in the top half of one of its windows, staring out first at his mother, then at the passing countryside. To make matters worse, his position as the brightest boy at school is challenged by the arrival of a new student, Jean Bonnet. Julien's first and ultimately telling words to Jean are, "I'm Julien Quentin, and don't mess with me."

Jean's tentativeness, even fearfulness, is our first clue that he is a Jew being hidden by the Carmelite monks who run the school. Our first purely visual clue comes during a scene in the boys' dormitory, after Jean has undergone the first of several hazings reserved for any new boy: in the well-lit background of a shot, we see, hanging on the wall, a large picture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel; in the foreground, we see Jean in almost complete darkness. Julien senses that somehow Jean is different, special, and he is both attracted to and repelled by him. After secretly observing Jean in prayer late at night on the Sabbath and going through Jean's possessions to discover that his real surname is Kippelstein, Julien asks an older boy what a Jew is. The answer: "They're smarter than us and they killed Jesus." Julien and Jean become friends, but this meeting of minds is made uneasy by Jean's (understandable) standoffishness and Julien's sometimes cruel, and always dangerous, curiosity about his new friend's background. Finally Joseph, formerly the kitchen boy at the school, and to whom I shall return below, informs the Gestapo that the monks are harboring Jews. A Gestapo agent then ap-

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pears in Julien and Jean's mathematics class and demands that Jean Kippelstein step forward. Nothing happens until Julien impulsively glances over his shoulder at Jean, seated toward the rear of the room. The Gestapo man knows from this who the Jew in the classroom is, and Jean quietly leaves with a German soldier. While packing in the dormitory, Jean says to Julien, "Don't worry. They'd have got me anyway." But Julien does worry, and Louis Malle's voice over the final image of the film—Julien's tearful face trapped in focus in the foreground, with everything behind him out of focus—tells us that he has never forgiven himself and that he "will remember every moment of that January morning until [he] die[s]." On that January morning in 1944, Jean Kippelstein and two other Jewish boys were taken away by the Gestapo, eventually to perish at Auschwitz. Father Jean, the headmaster, who was taken away with them, called out to the remaining Catholic students assembled in the school's courtyard, "Goodbye, children. See you soon."

Malle has never forgiven himself for inadvertently betraying Jean because he knows that his action was both inadvertent *and* intentional, was the impulsive act of a vain, infantile young man who resented the presence in his class of someone intellectually superior to him. His was a boy's mistake, however terrible, and Malle's confession is all the more moving when one remembers that his sin was deliberately and sometimes gainfully committed by many adults in German-occupied France. Still, there is something missing from *Au revoir les enfants*, something too modest or skimpy in its conception; the truth of Malle's memoir is, in the end, less the truth of art than of reportage. What the boy Louis Malle could not have seen in 1944 the filmmaker Louis Malle should have been able to see in 1987: that the story of Jean Kippelstein's betrayal hangs more on the actions of the kitchen boy Joseph than on those of Julien Quentin. (Jean is right when he says to Julien, "They'd have got me anyway"—just as they got the other two Jewish boys in the school without the help of Catholic students.)

Joseph informed the Gestapo that the Carmelite monks were harboring Jews because he had been fired from the school kitchen for stealing supplies and selling them on the black market; but the wealthy students—Julien among them—were themselves trading on this black market, with Joseph as their go-between: they gave him their gifts of food from home, which they were supposed to share with the entire, war-rationed school, and in return he procured for them what they wanted (in Julien's case, rare stamps). Joseph is singled out for punishment by the monks, who are aware of their students' transgressions as well as of his, because he is poor and dispensable, and the boys are from families whose money is indispensable to the school's functioning both as a school and as a haven for young Jews. The monks really had no choice, and neither did Joseph: desperate for a job as well as desirous of revenge, he turned to the Gestapo for work as an informant. The young Julien can't

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understand Joseph's betrayal of the school and rejects him for it; and the older Malle, who does understand Joseph's betrayal, underestimates its significance to his memoir as a whole and consequently gives the kitchen boy's actions far less attention than they deserve. As it stands, *Au revoir les enfants* is a work of quiet pathos, whereas it could have been a work of compelling tragedy.

François Négret gives the film's strongest, most shaded performance as Joseph, which is all the more reason this character deserves to share focus with Julien. Joseph is alternately a shirker cum schemer; a lover whose dark, rough good looks enable him to carry on an affair with the wife of the town doctor; and a whiner whose lameness and coarseness elicit cruel taunts and even beatings from the schoolboys. By comparison, the characters of Julien and Jean are nearly tame, and the actors Gaspard Manesse and Raphaël Fejtö can do little more with their respective roles than serve the film's pathos, though they might have deepened it. Something similar can be said about Renato Berta's cinematography, whose muted colors—browns, blues, grays—accent Malle's pathos rather than create tragic distinctions.

Louis Malle has rightly been accused of pretentiousness or artiness in such films as *Murmur of the Heart* (1971), *Black Moon* (1975), and *Pretty Baby* (1978), but at his best—in *Au revoir les enfants* and in the earlier *Fire Within* (1964) and *My Dinner with André* (1981)—he is detached yet inquisitive, unpretentious yet sure of himself and his material. (It should therefore come as no surprise that he began his career in 1956 in documentary and has continued to make documentary films: for example, *Phantom India* [1969], *Human, Too Human* [1972], and *God's Country* [1985].) With *Au revoir les enfants*, Malle returns to making films in France instead of the United States for the first time since 1975.

Another director who has split his career between his native country and the United States is the West German Wim Wenders. His best previous film was *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (1972), made in Germany from a novel by the Austrian Peter Handke and untouched by American influence. I say this because his worst work, whether shot in Germany or America, reveals a tendency to iconize Americana—to revel in things American for their own sake—and to ape American genre films. Examples: his two most recent films, both made here, *Hammett* (1980) and *Paris, Texas* (1984). With *Wings of Desire*, which he co-scripted with Handke, Wenders returns to Germany and to form, though he still can't resist the lure of Americana: Peter Falk plays himself in this film, an American actor-director on location in West Berlin.

Wings of Desire is the story of two angels, Damiel and Cassiel, who descend from heaven to eavesdrop on the inner life—mostly troubled—of earthly men and women. We hear that inner life in voice-over, we hear on the soundtrack what's going on in people's minds, as Damiel and Cassiel move among them in their apartments, on

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the streets, in the subway, in a library. The two angels are dressed in ordinary clothing and appear to be mortals, but they are invisible to all but the movie camera and, significantly, children. Damiel and Cassiel can absorb the inner or spiritual life of human beings, but they are more or less powerless to act on what they know: they are not gods. They seem able, by divine transference, to comfort or lend encouragement to some people, but Cassiel, for instance, is unable to prevent a man from jumping off a building to his death. Cassiel appears content to play his role as sympathetic, if finally impotent, listener and observer, and he does so throughout the film. But Damiel is frustrated: he wants to know less and experience more; he wants to leave the realm of spirituality and eternity and enter the one of materiality and temporality; he wants to become mortal. He says to Cassiel, "I want to enter history, if only to hold an apple in my hand."

In order to "enter history," the film implies, Damiel must love and be loved, and shortly after expressing his desire for mortality to Cassiel, he finds Marion, a trapeze artist with the failing Circus Alekan. (She "flies" as best a mortal can on her own; we never see the angels fly, though we do find them wearing their wings atop the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church and the Victory Monument in the Tiergarten.) When Damiel reads Marion's mind, she tells him and us, in voice-over, of her sadness at the absence of love in her life, of her strong desire to love. During this sequence in the circus' practice tent and in Marion's trailer, the film, which has been in eerie black and white up to now, twice switches briefly to color. Damiel later revisits Marion at the circus, after which he tracks her to a rock club; he also sees Peter Falk on the set of his new movie (in which he plays a detective in Berlin at the end of World War II) and then at a coffee stand, where Falk senses Damiel's presence although he cannot see him. Falk himself was an angel who became mortal, and this fact—which Damiel intuits here and Falk admits in a subsequent scene—coupled with Damiel's hearing Marion's mysterious repetition in voice-over in a dream (in a scene immediately preceding the one at the coffee stand) of lines from a poem about children that he has been composing intermittently during the film, galvanizes his change to mortal status and the film's final switch to color. (The excepted scenes are those in which Cassiel appears—they're still in black and white.) Damiel seeks out Falk again in between takes of the latter's film in order to learn all about life, but Falk, who of course can now see Damiel, tells him that he has to experience it for himself, preferably with the girl he has mentioned. Damiel returns to the rock club, finds Marion there, and unites with her over a drink. "I know now what no angel knows," Damiel writes in his journal at the end of the film—the same journal in which he has been composing his poem about children. The title "to be continued" then appears.

Wings of Desire takes its inspiration from the *Duino Elegies* and sev-

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eral other poems ("The Angels," "The Children," "Childhood's Duration") by the Austrian Rainer Maria Rilke. In 1912 at Castle Duino on the Adriatic coast, Rilke had a vision of the world as seen by an angel and conceived the cycle of ten elegies, which he completed in 1922. For Rilke the angel represented, not the angel of the Christian heaven, but the essence of pure being, at home in a vast, open world—in a pure space—that knows neither past, present, nor future; he represented the messenger, citizen, and gatekeeper of the invisible; and perhaps most important, the angel also represented to Rilke the terrifying demon of artistic creation. In the second of the *Duino Elegies*, he wrote that angels are "shields of ecstasy, stormy / tumults of rapturous feeling and suddenly, singly, / *mirrors*, which draw back into themselves / the beauty that has streamed out from their faces" (my translation, as are those that follow). And in a letter to Princess von Thurn und Taxis, his great patroness and his hostess at Castle Duino, he wrote, "I do not believe that anyone has ever experienced more fully the extent to which art goes against nature; it is the most passionate turning in on itself of the world." For Rilke, art and the angel are identical in their narcissism, in their existence unto themselves. But, as many commentators have noted, Rilke was torn between art and life, between the timeless realm of solitary, angelic exaltation and the temporal realm of mutual, earthly love—the love of two human beings for each other and for the dailiness of the world, their worship of its inexhaustible facticity. Rilke was so obsessed with his art, he had no time for life, for others; he also had so much difficulty with his art that it drove him back into the world, into love's embrace and the succor of the diurnal. The closest he came to a resolution of his problem was in the ninth of the *Duino Elegies,* where he celebrated the thing-ness of this world at the same time as he yearned for earthly death as his final and complete entrance into the angelic state of being:

> Praise this world to the angel, not the inexpressible one; *him*
> you can't impress with your splendid emotion; in the universe,
> where he feels with more feeling, you are a novice. So show
> him something simple, which, formed from one generation to
> another,
> lives as our own, close at hand and visible to the eye.
> Tell him of things. He will be the more astonished; . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . And these things,
> which live by dying, they know that you extol them; transitory,
> they look to us, the most transitory of all, for salvation.
> Want us wholly to transform them inside our hidden hearts,
> inside—oh, endlessly—inside us! . . .
>
> Earth, isn't that what you want: to rise up
> *invisibly* within us? . . .

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. . . . . .
Ineffably I have belonged to you forever and ever.
You were always in the right, and your holy inspiration
is our communion with death.

Wings of Desire is an allegory of the artist as angel who forsakes immortality for the sensual pleasures of loving, living, and dying, who gives up his narcissistic, internal, knowing art for an art that captures the surface of the world, and in capturing that surface, suggests its depths, its interiorities, its secrets, without actually revealing them. Damiel begins the film in the act of composing his poem about children—we hear him in voice-over, and we see the writing of the lines—and he returns to this poem three more times before writing in his journal that he knows now what no angel does. "When the child was a child," the poem opens, "it asked, / 'How come I'm me and not you? / Why am I here and not there? / When did time begin and where does space end?' " In "Childhood's Duration," Rilke wrote of the child, "Since it spent afternoons alone, it stared from one mirror to / another, puzzling over the riddle of its own / name: Who? Who? . . ." And in "The Children," Rilke wrote of the angel who addresses the children:

. . . The words he speaks
spread over them the whiteness of his wings:
"Is there among you one who thinks about
how speedily the quiet hours lead you all,
day in and each day out,
through gates and doorways many and so tall?
So easily and softly moves each hinge,
and all the gates and doors fall gently back in place.
I shall remain your conscience and your grace,
although your journey grows beyond my fringe.
You lust for life, and that is not within my sight;
you have to go in darkness, I am light."

Damiel knows by the end of *Wings of Desire not* to know, that he doesn't know and can't know, that the child can't answer the questions it poses and neither can he. Unlike Rilke's angel, Damiel gives up his pretensions to light and joins the children in their lust, their quest for life.

His partner, Cassiel, stays back, remains angelic, immortal, and self-enclosed, and Wenders and Handke keep him in the film for the purpose of contrast after it is clear that Damiel is the focus: Cassiel goes nearly everywhere Damiel goes or has gone—the circus, the rock club, the movie set, the coffee stand—but he always remains an interested observer and never has the impassioned urge to "enter history," to be and do. He is the artist as self-pronounced seer, and as such he spends a lot of time trailing an exhausted, soli-

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tary old man, especially—and appropriately—through a library. The old man is ironically named Home: he doesn't seem to have either a home or relatives. He is a storyteller who fears that his tales will be lost, and who knows that the Berlin of his youth was lost to the air raids of World War II (we get some documentary footage in the film of bombed-out Berlin). Home pompously believes that storytellers are needed more than others in this world, but he doesn't explain why. Yet at the same time he knows, and says, that the real storytellers of the world are its children. The child in the old man is right: it is the wondrous sensibility of the child, the film argues, that the artist must imitate, not the sagacious sensibility of the ancient, self-important storyteller. And it is in Berlin, a city nearly reborn out of the rubble and ashes of the war, that Damiel himself is reborn as an artist who views the world with a child's innocence, trust, and love. Damiel has left behind the artist as angelic transcendence, as distant observer and analyst of "the world behind the world," as he puts it, and has become the artist as earthly presence, as close experiencer and embracer of the world in itself, in all its dailiness and corporeality. Only from such an artist, it is implied, can truly "heavenly" art emerge: art that places its maker squarely in the world to which he belongs at the same time that, through its recording of surfaces, of the everyday, it evokes the wonder and mystery of that world, its invisible but persistent pointing to something besides itself.

This is clearly Peter Handke's film as much as it is Wim Wenders', if not more so. Nothing in Wenders' other work prepares us for the vision of the artist presented in *Wings of Desire*—except *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, for which Handke adapted the screenplay from his novel of the same title, and perhaps *The Wrong Move* (1975), again with a script by Handke that freely adapts, and makes contemporary, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Add to these last two films the excellent *Left-Handed Woman* (1977), which Handke made from his own novel and which Wenders produced. In this film, a photograph of the great Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu hangs on the wall of the main character's Paris home. At the end of *Wings of Desire*, the following dedication appears: "To all the angels: Yasujiro, François, and Andrei." I assume that François Truffaut and Andrei Tarkovsky are listed as artist-angels because of their relatively recent deaths (Truffaut's in 1984, Tarkovsky's in 1986), though each made films tangentially related to the theme of *Wings of Desire*. Ozu died in 1963, so the appearance of his name in the dedication is no matter of chronology. The titles of Ozu's best films—*Late Spring* (1949), *Tokyo Story* (1953), *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962)—suggest his subjects: the passage of time and life, the drama in the everyday existence of Japanese middle-class families, the physical world that surrounds these people and seems to witness their lives, almost like a silent chorus. Ozu viewed life as sacred, and the purpose of his art was not to tamper with that sacredness, nor

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to account for it, but simply and quietly to reveal it, with an absolute minimum of authorial selection and directorial intrusion. He is Handke and Wenders' ideal artist-as-angel-come-to-earth.

Peter Falk may not be equally ideal as an artist, but his persona is the earthly ideal of wry acceptance of life's pains as well as its pleasures, of its plenitude. He may be Wenders' American conceit in the film, but he is also the friendly, practical American and therefore the perfect person to introduce Damiel to the physical necessities of life—he makes sure, for example, that Damiel finds the money he needs to get started as a mortal. Bruno Ganz, who played the devil-angel of a Russian count in Eric Rohmer's *Marquise of O.* (1976), is Damiel, and he is extraordinary: light in manner, but with a basset hound of a face and a voice that is naturally warm and easy, that bathes the ears in sonorousness. Otto Sander, who plays Cassiel, is Ganz's physical and aural opposite: blond, reedy, rarefied. A similar opposition exists in Jürgen Knieper's music, which begins in eerie atonality and moves to resonant, Wagnerian heaviness, and in Henri Alekan's cinematography (the French circus in the film is named after him). Alekan shot both Cocteau's fantasy *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and René Clément's documentary *The Battle of the Rails* (1946), so he knows how to make black and white look either realistic or otherworldly, depending on the film. In *Wings of Desire*, the black and white is really black and gray with an overlay of green, and the effect is of a world viewed through flattening, ethereal filters. When the film switches to color, it is, appropriately, of the most rudimentary, raw kind, especially in daylight, which seems banished from the world of black and gray and green; that is, this is color as it might be seen by someone opening his eyes to the world for the first time. Wenders' camera itself seems to have discovered movement for the first time, so much does it revel in tracking and what is best described as swinging, from left to right and back to the left again. The camera's motion both on the ground and in the air (for shots of the city below) is lateral, never, to my recollection, vertical. The movement is not up, back toward the heavens, but sideways, in search of people and things. Once the camera stops, however, Wenders is careful to preserve the spatial integrity of a scene, keeping cutting to a minimum and keeping the camera back, so that it can take in the world and its inhabitants in all their fullness.

"To be continued," *Wings of Desire* declares at the end, and we are left to wonder whether the reference is to Damiel and his art, Wenders and his, achieved with the help of Handke, or to our own relationship with art and the world, whose physical reality film can put before us in a way no other art form can. This audacious film causes us to rethink that relationship, and its charm is that it does so in the shape of a fairy tale, not in the shape of a theoretical treatise.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

The Met's *Ring*

MUCH OF WHAT IS IMMEDIATELY ENGAGING about the Metropolitan Opera's new production of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—judging by its first three-quarters, for *Die Götterdämmerung* reaches the stage only this fall—will elude capture by the Deutsche Grammophon engineers who have been recording it in New York, unless a concurrent videotape of the staging by producer Otto Schenk and designer Günther Schneider-Siemssen is also planned for release next year as well. If what I have heard so far is a fair sample, this *Ring*'s musical merits, though considerable, will not jostle those two monuments of the stereophonic era, the Georg Solti-John Culshaw collaboration for London Records that first committed all of this operatic leviathan to discs, and Herbert von Karajan's subsequent recording of the late sixties and early seventies (not to mention the several "historical" alternatives stemming from broadcasts from Rome, Bayreuth and elsewhere). Yet, for the unreconstructed like this reviewer who dote on the receding great tradition, we can take heart that any corporation with books to balance and no fat subsidy would stick its neck out so far as to present another complete package of Wagner's massive work to an increasingly indifferent and undiscriminating world audience for "classics." And—who knows?—perhaps a digitally recorded *Ring* will stir up a new generation of devotees.

At the Met, *Die Walküre* was the first of the *Ring*'s four constituent parts to be produced, in the fall of 1986. Its opening scene proclaimed the production team's principles. Hunding's abode closely resembled the composer's description in the libretto; the rough-hewn walls are hung with plaited rugs and armor, steps lead to outer rooms to the left and right, and a crude hearth lies downstage. At the right rear is the broad door that will fly open to reveal the spring night as Siegmund and Sieglinde discover their love. Dominating all is the huge ash tree; its branches seem to spread across the stage and support the dwelling's roof. In its trunk can be seen the sword Nothung's hilt, and at the climactic moment later in the act Siegmund will draw it from its place in triumph.

And so it is throughout this production. The underground lair of the Nibelung horde is the junction of glowing burrows; the depths of the Rhine are subaqueous yet craggy enough to make Alberich's seizure of the gold seem a real athletic feat; Siegfried and Mime's cave looks like a cave and is fitted out with forging machinery and a

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hearth that were almost more than a hero could manage while at the same time singing Wagner's strenuous forging music. In that scene, too, Siegfried's bear comes on big as life, though he is perhaps too cuddly to be frightening even to an overstimulated imp like Mime. The Nibelheim dwarfs scrabble like real cretins; the giants look like giants, and the pivotal scene in *Rheingold* in which the treasure is stacked up against the giants' staves as payment for Valhalla is cunning, dramatically persuasive for the first time in my experience. At the end of *Siegfried*'s third act there is a fine, crackling ring of fire to surround Brünnhilde.

Schenk and Schneider-Siemssen are what might be called neo-revanchists: They are executing a return to Wagner's own stage directions and early Bayreuth *Ring* tradition that is at the same time leavened by contemporary ideas and tastes and the exploitation of today's technology. Though they have not escaped inconsistency (and banality) altogether, they have succeeded in making disparate elements harmonize in most cases. An example is the scene in *Rheingold* in which Alberich uses the Tarnhelm to turn himself into a toad. In the darkened environs of Nibelheim, he actually seems to hop along a log—an effect produced by using a spot of laser light to simulate the toad.

But, apt and charming as the staging is, it may be distinguished principally by what it is not. Schenk and Schneider-Siemssen have resisted the urge to encumber the production with a view of what the *Ring* "means," and have dared instead to let it reveal its meanings itself, unhampered by middleman perversities such as those that have given us hydroelectric plants and S.S. jackboots and skintight miniskirts on the Valkyries, all in the name of contemporaneity. The *Ring*, subtle and crude, obvious and obscure, mundane and magnificent, speaks for itself in this production.

I have said that the musical merits on the nights I was in attendance were considerable. Much of what was best came from the orchestra pit. Even James Levine's most unyielding detractors admit that during his tenure he has made a crack ensemble of a group of players who in the past often sank to mediocrity. After *Die Walküre* I reported that Levine himself seemed unsure of what he wanted in many places. Of *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried* last season he seemed more confident. The two chief characteristics of his operatic conducting in general were very much in evidence: his fondness for forward motion and his responsiveness to singers' needs. It is a good combination for the *Ring*: the stage action unfolded with a purposeful tension and release, and the orchestral interludes moved along without sagging. Perhaps some passages were stinted, but none except the most diehard Wagnerian, when faced with the five hours and more of *Siegfried*'s music, is going to be heard complaining about a tendency to rush. When it counted—as, for example, at the opening of the final act of *Siegfried*, when Wagner's mature orchestral style is heard for the first time in the *Ring* (seven years sep-

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arate the orchestration of the second and third acts)—the eloquent results suggested that the musicians were fully at ease.

The singing was a good deal more variable. In central roles of both *Rheingold* and *Siegfried*, portrayals were seriously flawed. But Wagner singing has historically been a source of vexation to performers, conductors and audiences alike, as well as to critics, and the universal acclaim for the likes of Lehmann, Melchior, Flagstad, and Schorr was the exception and not the rule even in the Wagnerian "golden age" of the thirties. The general level at the Met was good enough to sustain the willing suspension of disbelief, and in some instances it reached well above that.

Das Rheingold, the "prelude to the festival play," is an ensemble work, a panoply of fateful action rather than a vehicle for the revelation of a few individual fates. Even so, its theatrical vitality hinges on the figure of Wotan, who is flexing his muscles here, proud, prodigal and confident he can avert any threat to the gods' primacy. In the midwinter performance I saw, Hans Sotin often fell short in power and thrust, and a lazy way with phrases, coupled with a generally short-breathed delivery, robbed the music of dramatic tension. But reports about James Morris, Sotin's counterpart in earlier performances, indicate that not all the Met's *Rheingold*s will be so lacking a central support. The important role of Alberich, too, did not get full measure: Julian Patrick's vocal means, particularly at the low end, were inadequate to bring the character into focus.

But everywhere else the cast was strong, and two in it were outstanding. Helga Dernesch, once a fine Isolde, Senta and Eva, produced a rich tone for Fricka's lines, and delivered them conversationally, almost like lieder, so that they sprang to life. And Siegfried Jerusalem, though he forced his voice occasionally, made a fascinating Loge, by turns smug, insinuating and mercurial, full of vitality. Mari-Anne Haeggander's Freia and Aage Haugland's Fafner were also first-class vocal portraits, and Mi-Hae Park, Diane Kiesling and Meredith Parsons were a fine trio of Rhinemaidens.

Unlike *Rheingold*, *Siegfried* depends upon just a few central figures—the hero of the title role, the Wanderer, Mime and Brünnhilde—and the vocal and histrionic requirements are great. In only one instance were they fully met: Hildegard Behrens' Brünnhilde. The opera's construction favors the heroine: her appearance in the ring of fire near the end comes after two and a half long acts dominated by male voices. No wonder that, in the rapturous love duet that concludes the work, her ardor exceeds Siegfried's: He has been on stage for the better part of five hours by then, cavorting with a bear and forging a sword, slaying a dragon—a disappointment in this production, a tentacled Polyphemus whose inept flailing would be ludicrous in a low-budget Japanese sci-fi movie—and discussing his past and his future at sometimes wearying length with Mime, Alberich and the Wanderer.

But it would be churlish to begrudge Miss Behrens her triumph.

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She produced some distorted vowel sounds at the top of her range ("Sahg-fried!") and some blurry articulation of words elsewhere, and there were signs of strain where Wagner asks the most of his singers in volume and breath control. But for the most part she wound her supple tone through the long stretches in a way that made them throb with life. The ecstatic quality of the soaring passages of the love duet and the poignancy of her lines as she bent to her abandoned armor were equally irresistible.

The only other vocal achievement of this rank was Franz Mazura's. His Alberich was an illustration of what music drama should be and rarely is: tone, word and gesture fused, Nothunglike, into a theatrical unity. So keen was his realization of the character that one was sorry to see his exit after the encounter with Mime before the dragon's cave. It was the opposite case with Mime: Siegfried's slaying of that Nibelung ended a trying hour with Horst Hiestermann's excessively mannered acting and his quaver on sustained notes. Unfortunately, too, Donald McIntyre manifested little conviction in the Wanderer's early scenes with Mime and Alberich and could not muster the vocal power and color to make the later encounters with Erda and Siegfried anything more than mere note-reading.

The German tenor Toni Krämer, making his Met debut, was Siegfried. He has come a long way from the standard of his performance in the same role at Bayreuth, where I first heard him in 1986. But he is no Heldentenor, and his command of the role is still intermittent. He manages his rather recessive voice well and at times seemed to vault over his limitations and approach genuine ease and mastery: His forging song was rousing and drew an enthusiastic hand at the end of the first act, and the "Forest Murmurs" episode was engrossing and vocally assured. At other times, particularly where vocal calisthenics were necessary, his struggle with his resources produced clumsy phrasing, approximate pitch and a generally effortful air. His alternate in the role, the Austrian tenor Wolfgang Neumann, was reported to be only slightly more successful, and although the popular Peter Hofmann is announced once again for both this role and the *Götterdämmerung* Siegfried for this season, when—for the first time in more than two decades at the Met—the entire cycle will be presented in sequence, the fact that he withdrew last spring shortly before the first *Siegfried* performance does not imply that he has overcome the severe vocal distress that has afflicted him in recent years.

Nonetheless, with Levine conducting, and such singers as Miss Behrens, Miss Dernesch, Christa Ludwig, Hanna Schwarz, Jessye Norman, Jerusalem, Mazura, Morris, Robert Schunk and Kurt Moll on hand, the cycle should provide rewards sufficient for even the most exacting partisan.

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

Intellectuals and Professions

In memory of M. S.

Scott Buchanan, Stringfellow Barr, Robert M. Hutchins, Alexander Meiklejohn—you should be living at this hour! The contemporary discussion about education, the Great Books, standards, and the fate of the university curriculum has need of those earlier stalwart figures in the history of American education. Perhaps the subject would not have been staked out in such a ponderous manner if they were still here to participate in recent episodes of this continuing discussion about education in a democracy. Allan Bloom's much talked-about book, *The Closing of the American Mind*,[1] has called attention to the subject anew, amid controversies about core courses, and readings in Western civilization. The subject is a venerable one, the shared possession of many generations, with its own interesting history. Bloom, however, writes as if he were the first and only one genuinely concerned about it. He seems uninterested in knowing how others have thought, or that outside the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought, the subject had engaged the minds of others. Barr and Buchanan were the ones who created the Great Books program at St. John's College, Annapolis; Hutchins was at Chicago, and Meiklejohn at Amherst and Wisconsin, John Erskine at Columbia College. And there were all the other colleges and universities involved in new thought and new programs in the twenties, before the young Allan Bloom's imagination was fired by what he learned later were fake "Gothic" buildings at the University of Chicago. It would be salutary to have the observations of the veterans of that history, especially those who themselves had had other kinds of scholastic experience and could engage their opponents in a spirited Socratic exchange.

As a young woman, I used to know some people from St. John's, who shared with a group of us their affectionate familiarity toward the great figures of the Western tradition. They would speak of Socrates in his various moods as if he were an idiosyncratic but delightful uncle, they would speak of St. Augustine and his emotions and problems, or fondly summon Erasmus, Spinoza or St. Thomas, and our group adopted all those venerable masters, and others

[1]THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND, by *Allan Bloom*. Simon & Schuster, $18.95.

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Western and non-Western. We all knew that the unexamined life was not worth living. How could it be lived better than on intimate terms with Locke, and Hume and Mill, and by assuming that they were speaking directly to us? It seemed like a wonderful way to live, close to the great eminences of the past. Everything could be apprehended in simplicity and good humor, as we gathered around the table and the text. A young man could send a girl Euclid, with a witty inscription, as naturally as a book of poetry. And Euclid *was* a kind of poetry, more than high school geometry would ever be, the great proofs and propositions seeming to hold within them some approachable wisdom with which to meet the world and one's destiny. Dante the pilgrim, stumbling through the *Purgatorio*, under Virgil's guidance, could seem like one of us struggling through the dark wood of youth, beset by demons and dangers, and only dimly seeing the way ahead.

As promoted by Professor Bloom, however, the classics convey nothing of that excitement or intimacy or freshness. Heavy-handed sarcasm and satire, dark premonitions, and despair about young people and universities so thoroughly blanket Bloom's observations that the medicine he offers may seem worse than the disease itself! Apparently Bloom's ideas have disturbed many people; perhaps the book was written not to enlighten, persuade or convince but, precisely to disturb. And in this he has succeeded. The book has been widely reviewed, in tones of alarm and outrage, with occasional approval of his argument. The highly-charged responses are provoked by his synoptic version of the development of modern thought: he asserts that the universities are doomed unless they bring back the Greek philosophers because after the Greeks there was no unity of thought; Kant and Goethe represented the last moment of wholeness, and the rest has been the hideous decline into noxious modernity. Universities and their mindless curricula can be redeemed from moral and intellectual bankruptcy only by the Great Books.

Much of the argument is unexceptionable: to be *against* the Great Books is almost as irrational as being against apple pie or motherhood, but difficulties develop when there is a reasonable effort to determine *which* of the innumerable Great Books are to comprise a curriculum, and what justification there may be for choosing some and excluding others. There are further problems with the purity of a curriculum devoted *entirely* to these texts, and to the methods proposed for studying these texts: such as, whether they are believed to be unrelated to their social or historical periods, whether other kinds of knowledge can illuminate the discussion of them, whether other intellectual disciplines have any independent validity, and so on. These important questions are no part of Professor Bloom's concern. It is rather his ideas about who should be educated in the modern university, and what principles should organize

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modern knowledge, that have led many critics to denounce him as an "elitist," whose ideas are inimical to modern democratic culture.[2] In fact, most of his argument for the Great Books tradition is structured to set off the recital of his experiences at Cornell in the sixties, when he believes the idea of the university was destroyed by radicalized students and professors. His account reads very much as if it were written in the midst of the turmoil and not reread until he saw page proofs for this book. If "radicalize" is a verb form used about changes of opinion, direction, and behavior, then "conservatize" must be produced to describe Bloom's post-sixties intellectual position. Defiantly adopting almost the opposite of any idea even faintly resembling liberalism, he proceeds not only to denounce the sixties as a period of unmitigated disaster, but even mourns the passing of the fifties, and truculently denies that anything of value has emerged in intellectual life during the past thirty-five or forty years.

Bloom's colleagues are understandably disturbed by this sweeping condemnation. Anyone even minimally observant of American life since the sixties cannot possibly view these past decades as the monstrous apotheosis of more than two hundred years of intellectual error. And there are even greater problems with Bloom's threnody for a world we have lost, that time "when gentlemen ruled" and the climate for philosophy was more "salubrious," in contrast to the time when "the people, the *demos*, ruled"—which he identifies as the reign of "religious fanaticism and vulgar utility"! Plato would surely have been more exact, and Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch and anyone else would vainly comb through history to locate this time. Bloom's critics would share dismay with the Greek historians. It is puzzling to see how Bloom's veneration for Greek thought has failed to give him the transforming experience great works and deeds usually generate in those who have been affected by them. On the contrary, Bloom is given only to harsh accusations: the serious bifurcation in modern thought is attributed to liberal malevolence; specific figures are accused of deliberately overturning the old order, and are held responsible for a range of modern phenomena, from cultural relativism and egalitarianism to rock music, the lack of jobs, and the decline of language study. Reciting them provokes a vengeful sneer—"They have gotten what they deserved

[2]In fact, one of Bloom's reviewers even entitled her critique of his book "Undemocratic Vistas." Martha Nussbaum, Professor of Philosophy at Brown University, in *The New York Review of Books*, 5 November 1987, pp. 20–26. What this philosopher was calling into question were not Bloom's Platonic or Aristotelian allegiances but his false claims for the ancients, his unjustified sheltering under their aegis, his inadequate reading of the very texts he would put at the center of a reformed university curriculum, and his indifference to others in the same tradition. She had Whitman very much in mind and looked at Bloom's ideas in the context of classical Greek thought as well as American ideals.

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. . ."—and the Professor of Social Thought who claims the Bible as a Great Book forgets about Romans 12. Elsewhere, he refers to his humanist colleagues as "antiquarians, eunuchs guarding a harem of aging and now unattractive courtesans," and snappishly dismisses their efforts "That kept them busy enough to avoid thinking about the nothingness of their endeavor." Nor is he above referring to a whole department at Cornell as "a laundering operation for radical Left French ideas."

It has been suggested that *The Closing of the American Mind* is really the latest novel by Saul Bellow.[3] Professor Bloom, then, is to be seen as one of Bellow's inventions, like Sammler, Augie March, Henderson, Humboldt, or any of the other vivid, colorful, absurd persons who have sprung from the imagination of the American novelist and Nobel Prize winner, himself in the Committee on Social Thought. Indeed, the suggestion has a certain frivolous plausibility about it: Bloom *does* in many ways recall those driven characters, especially displaying the same humorlessness and obsessive absorption in self-enclosed ideas.[4] Professor Bloom makes use of the same sort of colloquialism that often characterizes the speech of Bellow's characters, that overreaching for the grand phrase combined with a surge of streetwise imagery, a comprehensive sneer, or a nasty growl. Tags from old translations of Plato and Aristotle will refer quaintly to "tyrants," "knowers," "artisans," "gentlemen," all seeking "the good," and then yield to Bloom's own rougher vocabulary, scornfully seeing students as "cubs" who "teethed" on false modern morality. It is not Socrates speaking, as we know him from Plato, but rather a mad intoxicated idea of Socrates that a Bellow character might have.

These modern books that isolate a certain seemingly deplorable condition, and then plunge into a dramatic portrayal of their imagination of disaster, often show a defective historical sense. "Professor Bloom" would claim that as a virtue, perhaps, because he is so dismissive of history, preferring always to ask grandly, "What is good?" instead of the more useful "What happened and why?" Russell Jacoby's analysis of intellectual life appears not to suffer so much from that same problem. His *The Last Intellectuals*,[5] argues that intellectual life can no longer exist in its familiar form, but he

[3]By Robert Paul Wolff, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in *Academe*, September-October 1987, pp. 64–65.

[4]Bloom's explicit denunciation of feminism reads like a quotation from a diatribe in a Bellow novel. Women in Bellow's novels have no reality or existence; similarly, although this book claims to address the modern university and its fate, it speaks almost entirely of "man" and "men" as the community to be considered; apparently for Bloom the 51 percent of the population that is female hardly exists in the university, either as students or as faculty members.

[5]THE LAST INTELLECTUALS: American Culture in the Age of Academe, by *Russell Jacoby*. Basic Books. $18.95.

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looks to history as well as to abstract definitions to understand the situation. Jacoby is himself a free-floating intellectual in the old style, one who has taught at several universities but, according to the book jacket, has no permanent institutional identity. Presumably the subject of intellectuals and professions developed from pondering on his own situation, and he has generalized it into a question about contemporary life. The absence from intellectual and academic life of C. Wright Mills, the radical sociologist, structures much of Jacoby's analysis, as he notes with dismay both the lack of a viable tradition of critical Marxist thought, and the failure of the sixties' enthusiasm to create new social forms or to produce a generation of productive intellectuals. Thumbing through statistics of birth, occupation, and death, he notes how many of those who might have constituted the missing generation have committed themselves to academic life. In an earlier day, they would have been free, unattached, roving intellectuals, like Edmund Wilson, Mary McCarthy, Lewis Mumford, Dwight Macdonald, living by their wits. The academicization of intellectual life troubles Jacoby, and the loss of bohemian enclaves, and the disappearance of what he calls "public intellectuals," who would address the educated and intelligent on issues of interest. In our own day, he argues, academic life has coopted those who might earlier have been the "public intellectuals"; specialization, professionalism, and the various increasingly technical vocabularies have isolated intellectuals from the "public realm," with serious consequences for intellectual life.

Jacoby does not have a very spacious view of the situation he decries, and his concern with the failures of intellectual succession in his own lifetime narrows the perspective considerably. Only a few decades are involved when he anatomizes intellectual generations; he is uninterested in any larger historical context for the problem, and equally indifferent to the European or South American experience of intellectuals and professionals. Important indices of social change don't affect his argument, except to suggest that changes in the cost of living prevent intellectuals from living the simple, frugal, marginal, quasi-bohemian unattached life of the mind, as legend asserts was possible in the thirties. Curiously, an argument that proposes so incisive an analysis of the circumstances of intellectual life fails to examine the emergence of large numbers of educated people who did not in fact exist before, when colleges and universities educated only a minute proportion of the population, when most citizens of this great republic were Emma Lazarus' struggling masses yearning to breathe free. In those golden days, the much-apostrophized "public realm" contained, figuratively speaking, only a handful of people.

The term "public realm" refers to a varied social world, small enough for candid exchange of ideas, where the acknowledgement of the existence of others is taken as a given, and there is a shared

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objective concern for the ideals that all hold in common. A more rigorous critique would question whether a "public realm" can survive in any serious sense in the midst of our ubiquitous and highly developed public relations industry, which also did not exist in the great ages of the "public realm." Publicity and the celebrity culture in our own day can manufacture concerns, or invent the existence of others or intrude upon a candid exchange of ideas, especially by changing the scale or the audience who maintains objective concern, thus transforming what earlier public intellectuals might have valued so highly. Historical reality also compels a further hesitation about the term: for most of human history, the "public realm" sanctioned ideas and practices which should disqualify it as an ideal; it countenanced behavior and customs which were surely unworthy, ignoble, even despicable. At the same time, the "public realm" was open only to certain ideas and concerns; like a private club, its hospitality to much of human experience was distinctly limited. The "public realm's" indifference to the human concerns of women and its exclusion of women should give pause to those who use the term so fondly. Nor were women the only ones excluded: slaves were not part of the "public realm" in Greece, the poor have never been considered part of it, nor the uneducated or barely educated, the immigrants. In Old New York, the civic culture so often celebrated by urban historians defined the "public realm" deliberately to exclude certain people. So the question of its formation and structure should have been more important in this analysis.

The Last Intellectuals and *The Closing of the American Mind* typify a certain kind of book which may begin with a very small printing and then all of a sudden "take off" and begin to sell wildly, going into several editions, surprising the publishers and editors. Swollen sales figures then confound those observers who thought the American public was interested only in diet books, or Harlequin romances. Multitudes have purchased Bloom's book, and there is much talk about it, despite its subject of seemingly limited interest. Who is reading the book? And what do they find in it? Has it perhaps been assigned in some of those innumerable reading groups which meet all over the country, commanding intense loyalty from their members, who devotedly read and discuss Great Books and other books at libraries, civic centers, or members' houses? Or is the argument being digested by some of those in charge of university curriculum committees, who seek guidance from ostensible authorities outside their own community? Perhaps Bloom's bleak condemnation of intellectual standards, coupled with his denunciation of relativism, the sixties, affirmative action, and contemporary student life, has appealed to those whose impatience with academic life can easily be provoked. Many of them were predictably roused to vent their severe but uninformed criticism when faculty committees at Duke and Stanford revised the readings in Western civilization

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courses, and their critiques were echoed in newspaper articles and rejoinders. Are these the readers Bloom wrote for, and do they welcome any denunciation or apparent attack on liberal ideology, no matter how inaccurate or distorted? Jacoby's readers, a different group, may no longer be troubled by Bloom's problems, but are genuinely concerned about the university and about specialization, and academicization. They wonder about the decline of the easy intelligence of educated people who could take all knowledge as their province, whose intelligence could guide them in making sense of the various disciplines in relation to one another. Some of those interested in Jacoby's study are distressed about the terrible gulfs in intellectual life, and the isolation of professionals within their professions, their insularity, their insensitivity to the world outside their specialty, the resulting indifference and atomization of intellectual life. Such disintegrating movements in the life of learning and intellect are of great concern to various intellectuals, whether "public" or "private." So the question must be, Why are these books not better at what they are doing? What does it say about the reading public, about publishers and about editors, that such unsatisfactory books are published and widely promoted, that they attack subjects of genuine interest and importance with only minimal analysis or insight, not to mention constructive thought about alternatives, or institutions which could ameliorate some of the disastrous consequences presented so passionately?

Like many other comprehensive attacks on intellectual life today, these books display an unmistakable animus toward academics and professionals, and a tenderness toward those who have stood apart. Bloom regards any profession other than "knower" or philosopher as base; certainly any academic other than a philosopher teaching the Great Books is contemptible, in his pages. Jacoby seems to view the levels in professional education, the steps in apprenticeship, and the cultivation of professional distinction entirely in their debased form. His alternative, admittedly vague, is that in place of such goals, academics should engage in political action, perhaps like some of the political action of youthful left intellectuals in the sixties! But he has nothing serious to suggest about the fate of those intellectuals and academics for whom the society has no employment. So focused on earlier models of the intellectual life, he is quite unaware, for example, of the growing organizations of independent scholars throughout the country, a recent and important development, or even of the significant efforts at interdisciplinary research undertaken in existing institutions. Professor Bloom wants only to preserve the university as a place of quiet removal from the world, where specially selected persons can, by philosophizing, preserve the possibilities of thought, much as enclosed religious communities attempt to preserve the possibilities of spiritual communication by prayer and silence.

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A reader might never learn from either of these books about the immense changes in society since the fifties and sixties, or that entire new groups exist in society, or that the education of these groups is considered to be a responsibility of the society, and that customs deriving from much earlier forms of education may not even provide desirable models. The G.I. Bill and the baby boom, the growth of the middle class, all change the proportions of the question, but Bloom and Jacoby are so enmeshed in their *idées fixes* that they are uninterested in assessing the conditions that have transformed their models. No serious observer can fail to acknowledge the revolution precipitated by computers, by paperbacks, by information technology. Unimagined access to texts and to complex sources of information now exist and are readily available to students everywhere, not only at the elite universities. Bloom may have failed to perceive this, but it is as notable as rock music in the student world. The implications may be ominous, but the genie cannot be put back in the bottle, nor the knowledge stuffed back into the minds that invented it. Socrates has told us that the unexamined life was not worth living. Clearly, even now there are dimensions of life requiring a more candid Socratic examination.[6]

[6]Even in the golden past, though, in 1913, students might have heard *Le Sacre du Printemps*, which was greeted with vituperation, much more than Bloom expends on denouncing rock music. And that was long before Black Studies, science, Women's Studies, psychology, sociology, and other Bloom *bêtes noires* were encountered in American colleges and universities.

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ALICE BLOOM

Adults Only

"THATCHER'S ENGLAND" BE DAMNED. It's every Englishman's England, and there are no "Reagan Years," or "Nixon Years," or any other "times" that weren't created by each act of any of us alive during those days. The large world outside shapes individual life, yes; but private life also creates public world. This homely truth is what the great novels of any age have kept before us. If there's a windmill to tilt, there's also a brass pot on your head; "only connect," as one of the great novelists has said.

People seem to forget that advice, though. During my recent trip to Great Britain, during their Easter holiday, the bed & breakfast farms were jammed with teachers "just relaxing, thank God," or hill-climbing parents with booted offspring. Sensing American Nosiness, these adults regaled us over sausage, marmalade, and the world's nastiest coffee (and whose fault is *this*, I'd like to know), with eye-rolling, much-put-upon accounts of the failure of "Thatcher's trash policy," the current scandal, as though this poor lady were personally responsible for every Wimpy's carton blowing along the Thames. Meantime, back in London, I did not see anyone stoop to pick up a single piece of it and London, frankly, is a-swill. I half hoped, hovering about, to see "Thatcher" or wow, Herself, out with a dustpan and broom in front of their respective residences. It seemed the least, or the most, they could do.

My point is this: novels are written by adults for other adults. So it's adult life, with its universal necessity to stoop down and pick up a piece, that must be portrayed. If this is not the definition of novels anymore, then rectangular adult books ought to be stamped out into the shape of locomotives, apples, and duckies so that we know ahead of time what we're plunking down a twenty-dollar bill for. Second thing we'd like to expect: if we're going to read hundreds of pages about adult men and women wincing when clotted pizza sauce on wax paper soils their ankles or hose, there ought to be an adult writer standing nearby saying "well for heaven's sake, pick it up." Nor should we, adult readers, be allowed by any novel to remain in a comfortable whining and moaning mode, blaming the "years," or the Big People: Reagan, Thatcher, etc. A novel is exactly *not* an unpublished lyric poem, bound in mooncalf. It is ipso facto a message to the public about growing up, or failing to do so. I will now apply this Nanny theory of literature to six new novels: four from England, one from Australia, one from America.

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Each of the four from England opens with a party scene: a reunion dance at Oxford (Murdoch); a New Year's Eve affair for 200 (Drabble); a drinks thing at a gallery opening (Weldon); and an afternoon tea & cakes (Brookner) shared by the protagonist and the little family she is about to cannibalize. From this moment on, the ball being over, all things that looked festive or at least in working order, begin to backfire, break down, unravel. The novels then, to some extent, de-resolve, and open where traditional comedy used to end.

One could also decide, reading them, that although there's still a whole Great Britain throbbing away beyond the exhaust of London, novels set anywhere out there, or off the motorway connecting London to Oxford, aren't being written nowadays; or perhaps don't reach our shores; or when they do they're published by Virago Press and no other. Or maybe London is at last a mere trope, like L.A., and varieties of post-Christian life and post-modern orthodoxies require certain landmarks and a familiar overall end of civilization smog. So much for general speculation.

Fay Weldon's *The Hearts and Lives of Men*[1] (read the arcane "people") opens with a party at Leonardo's, a "firm rather like Sotheby's and Christie's" and, a wonderful tip-off here, this party is for the "first of its really major shows—an exhibition of the works of Hieronymus Bosch." What happens is—

> Love at first site—that old thing! Helen and Clifford looked at one another at a party back in the sixties; something quivered in the air between them, and, for good or bad, Nell began. Spirit made flesh, flesh of their flesh, love of their love—and fortunately, and no thanks to the pair of them, it was, in the end, for good. There! You know already this story is to have a happy ending. But it's Christmastime. Why not?

Thus we know, by page 2, not the details of the "happy ending" maybe, but that this novel will be larkish, rash, wiseacre, and full of surprise as the story, we're told in one of many "Dear Reader" asides, "follows real life pretty closely—which is why it may at times seem far-fetched."

Along with far-fetched real times (jets explode, facelifts fall, spies are knighted, heavy metal bands promoting devil worship are aided by an LSD-imbibing Irish priest, great art is "investment buying," etc.) all sorts of shameless fairy-tale and the corniest nineteenth-century melodrama motifs and allusions abound. There's the "Dear Reader" and "Little Nell" business. There's also a den of thieves, an orphanage, a secluded castle, bloodhounds, unalloyed goodness, and evil; cliff-hanger events, a chatty old-dame narrator who tells us

[1]THE HEARTS AND LIVES OF MEN, by *Fay Weldon*. Viking. $18.95.

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what to think, unfashionable thrills, sentimentality, omniscience, and occasional long asides about proper suppers for growing children, art or love in the modern world, and so on. What's most fun is to anticipate, not only the bonkers turns of plot, but which rule of modern telling Weldon will break next, including the amusing fact that the novel was first serialized in Britain's good-housekeeping mag., *Woman*.

Little Nell, as her story unfolds, undergoes every peril but being tied to the proverbial tracks. Three times, she literally comes through fire. Dear Reader is kept in touch with where she is (orphanage, den of hippy thieves, etc.) but Nell is assumed long dead or lost by her parents and other adults, until the climax when she turns up with, but look, I won't spoil the story. Given all this Gothic fun, and if we're going to tolerate being addressed as "dear" throughout, it seems only reasonable to expect a Moral and, dear reader, there is one. Here it is: not only does lovable Nell remain likable, too; not only does she suffer every setback (if exploding planes, bloodhounds and all can be called "setbacks") but she flourishes in mind and body, is well-mannered, diligent, thoughtful, kind, able to delay gratification, and make the best of things and in general is, from babyhood on, quite a virtuous grown-up person. It's the adults who are brats, who play with toys as though they were real and people as though they were dolls. Quite a moral. Unlike Nell's improbable history, these adults, feckless parents included, do the "real life" things, fall in love, buy property, etc., but in Weldon's version of upside-down London, the Gothic fancies turn out to be the most solid, the fairy child the most substantial human being, and so-called "real" life in today's silly world is the illusory and fantastic dream. This would be merely a charming conceit if the "adults" weren't also so bloody dangerous. If they don't get their way, at once, the world comes down: fistfights, insults, abuse, drinks thrown across restaurants, paintings slashed, children abandoned, and impulsive trips to emergency room, drug dealers, abortionist, divorce court, keep all the taxis in the city on the move.

So, although the novel is delightful in its crazy energy, inventive story line, old-time pleasures, and general tongue-in-cheekiness, Weldon's story proves to be a wise, serious, very moral cautionary tale about the difficulties of Everychild trying to stay alive in the age of unchecked adult narcissism.

Up to now, I've enjoyed Margaret Drabble's many novels of iffy life in modern England, and must confess I got involved in the three major characters, women, of this new one, *The Radiant Way*.[2] Perhaps this isn't saying all that much, as I also get involved in the story on the back of the cereal box. However, this novel has not been called a good breakfast read, which is about what it is, but

[2]THE RADIANT WAY, by *Margaret Drabble*, Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

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"enormous" and "profound" and of course "Thatcher's England" comes in for some trouncing here, too. Well snap, crackle, pop, what novel isn't called "enormous" and "profound" these overpuffed days. But my purpose is not to review reviews, but to say there's something wrong with this novel, and here's a quote from early on that might demonstrate what it is:

> . . . she had felt reality to be revealed to her at times in flashes beyond even the possibility of rational calculation, had felt in danger (why danger?) of too much knowledge, of a kind of powerlessness and sadness that is born of knowledge. For these reasons, perhaps, was it that she had decided to multiply the possibilities so recklessly, to construct a situation beyond her own grasping? A situation of which not even she could guess the outcome? Had she wished to test her powers, or, a little, to lose control and stand aside? To be defeated, honourably, by the multiplicity of the unpredictable, instead of living with the power of the knowingness? With the limits of the known?

Quite. Now, what might this be describing? A life-altering decision or occasion, surely—suicide, murder, holy matrimony? holy orders? holy hell? No; the character here is about to get up from her dressing table and go downstairs to greet the "multiplicity of the unpredictable"—which phrase, despite the sonorous implications, refers to the different kinds (actresses, politicians, journalists, etc.) of people she's invited to her party—the "situation beyond her own grasping"—whose hour has come. That is, sorry about that, which is about to begin.

Several things are wrong here. First, the prose inflates the event. Sweetie, if this is how giving a party makes you feel, forget it. However, this prose might inflate any event. This inflation is consistent; another sample, this one describing another major character, dressing to come to this party:

> The Fluid Foundation comes in a little opaque beige plastic container, and is labelled, in gold lettering, Teint Naturel. She bought it a year ago and recalls that it cost a great deal of money. She uses it infrequently. Now she cautiously squeezes the container. Nothing happens. Is it dry? Is it empty? How can one tell? She squeezes again, and this time a great glob of Teint Naturel extrudes itself from the narrow aperture onto her middle finger. She gazes at it in mild dislike. It glistens, pinky brown, faintly obscene, on her finger.

The second thing wrong is this: no amount of grand language can disguise the truth that this is private life at its most unimportant—a mirror, a tube of makeup, a fingertip. Maybe that stuff shouldn't

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even be in a novel at all. The energy of imagination and the expenditure of time (the adult character's, the adult writer's) have, being published, entered the public domain which deserves, given anybody's time and times, better than devout meditations on Teint Naturel. Where is this usually intelligent writer's intelligence? her sense of proportion? and what is her relation to us? I'm not even certain that the above isn't some wicked parody (of *Mrs. Dalloway*?).

And what is Drabble's opinion of these intelligent women whose minds and valuable minutes ("is it dry? is it empty? how can one tell?") are presumably sympathetically entered? This scrupulous attention to minutiae makes them look ridiculous, despite the record of their Cambridge educations, their impressive talk, their useful, powerful careers (social work/teacher; psychiatrist; art historian). We don't see them at work; hundreds of pages of intense privacy, but not so much a novel of manners either, as a novel of mannerisms. These Drabble adults all seem like brats, too, but with Nobody around to say so or give them a good swift smack. While all the fussing goes on ("is it dry? is it empty? . . . . did he? will I?") the world's stern stuff gets most deplorably, outrageously neglected: children (again), dying parents, poor relatives, trash on the London streets, but as far as I can tell, the vulgarity of neglect is not the moral point of the novel.

Well I know art's art and life's whatever, but I kept wanting Drabble to want her characters to realize their own power for good, do more, if their world's in such a mess as they seem to notice, register along the nerves, lament. Thatcher's fault—every middle-aged face looking into the times and finding that once-firm ideals have gone a bit saggy? Perhaps I only long for the sharp nose of Fay Weldon to peer over the shoulder and say "No! me! me! I'm the fairest one of all!" and make us laugh at these powerful adults taking their wrinkles, compromises, and disappointments in a too private, too serious, perhaps even a girlish way. Our vision would thus be corrected.

As my space is short, my bone to pick not yet clean, and the next novel already well read and reviewed, I'll merely add: hip hip for ungirlish Iris Murdoch, and hooray for her big, baggy, tightly textured, warmly and intricately colored, masculine, no, fatherly, yes, fatherly tweed suit of a novel[3] that will doubtless outlast the fickle winds of fashionable new cut and the burrs of gripers and the creeping damp of post-modern anything. "Only connect" is here taken, as usual in her novels, about as far as the looms of fiction (and probability) can weave. Though set mostly in the city again, this novel is not without further country analogues. Recently (this is hearsay only, but I'll use it with that understanding), Murdoch has said that her characters are not memorable, not, she is supposed to

[3]THE BOOK AND THE BROTHERHOOD, by *Iris Murdoch*. Viking. $19.95.

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have said, like Dickens' characters. Perhaps so; Murdoch's characters have reasonably normal, forgettable names, no Gradgrind or Murdstone. Second, there are so many characters in any Murdoch novel, and they are given such equal amounts of story, attention, concern, which makes them all somehow major, they all move and change; so her people aren't minor set pieces, coming on once in a while to do their weird and distinguishing thing, like holding a wedding shoe, or lifting themselves up by the hair, or spontaneously combusting, etc. Third, though Murdoch's characters have their habits, repetitions, idiosyncracies, and very much their own minds, they are given language to think and talk about these things, rather than single gestures to mime them out. Nevertheless, there are two things deeper, that is, more brave and wholesome, which *are* like Dickens; and one is the word and the difficult enactment of "brotherhood," and the other is the overall vision of life like a dance. (And it is a dance—a reunion dance—that opens this novel, as noted above.)

No, not a vision of the untouching exhibitionism people gyrate through nowadays, but an old, a country dance. One that involves 14 couples and is done to imitate the calendar, to celebrate something in the world which has danced round again, like Christmas, or Harvest Home. A dance through which, if you last, you move from the bottom of the figure through a maze of claspings and unclaspings, working to the top position and back round again, as long as the novelist's fiddle can sustain the tune. A dance in which you are never allowed to forget, whatever your handicap or pride of individual flourish, that what you're dancing is a long-honored configuration, needing everyone's attention and cooperation, or else the whole pattern (life) falls apart. You're in, if you're invented by Murdoch, an old human ritual, blessed, rich, ragged, funny, serious, and complex; and one set out in its lively meaning long before you entered, though needing you now, as there is no dance apart from your dancing.

Anita Brookner's Rachel, the English "friend" of the title,[4] dances by herself, turning on the floor of her lonely obsessions, her mind shut against the failure of music, the lack of partners, until the very end of this slight, sad novel. Rachel is also the narrator, though the voice is Brookner's customary brisk, unpretentious, sharp spare style which delivers such delicious observations. It sees the small things, and what it sees, who it sees, is pinioned forever: forever a person who peels an orange "delicately," forever a small, tight, well-off family of intensely interior limits that lives with peach-colored lampshades, three-course teas, white rugs, and "ferocious central heating." The plot is: how far into her own heart and consciousness—of her lonely, envious life—will Rachel allow this intelligence

[4]A FRIEND FROM ENGLAND, by *Anita Brookner*. Pantheon. $15.95.

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to cut? Very far, by the end. Ultimately this is a story, like other novels by Brookner, about energy unused, perhaps unwanted. And a story about sin: frightful envy, in this case, which describes, with its knowing eye, everything—white rugs, peach shades, teary goodwill—that it really wants to own, but doesn't, and never will. Despite the sharp, engaging portraits of unhappy women, I wish now that Brookner would try again the larger canvas of *Family and Friends*, a few novels back, which chronicled a large family (the men of it, too) over many years. Brookner's grasp, I believe, exceeds the reach of these careful, shrewd, individual portraits which have become, somewhat Pym-like, her specialty.

There aren't enough books by or about tough old people. The "Newspaper" of Elizabeth Jolley's title[5] is a charwoman, also called "Weekly," who has been cleaning the big houses on "one of the longest and oldest streets in town" for many years. To her employers, she's the usual: a mainstay, a sort of joke by now, a "character," but also slightly feared because she carries the "news" of each household up and down the street: "Chatham's girl's engaged at long larst. Two rooms full of presents you should just see the jugs and glasses and the stainless steel cuttelry and talk about coffee tables and vawses!"; or, "Kingston's boy's ad 'orrible accident, lorst 'is job o'course but then that's because of what e's been taking, growing the stuff on a piece of cloth on top of the wardrobe."

Jolley's swift, compassionate narrative follows Weekly home, however, where she lives "alone in a rented room covered in brown linoleum which she polished mercilessly every morning," and readers soon get to know what employers never cared about or bothered to imagine: her real name, her history, her dream for enough savings to buy a cottage in the country. That dream, after many wonderful scenes in the big houses, and with a dreadful human parasite, the imperious old Nastasya, and a perfectly reasonable not-so-accidental homicide, is realized: a cottage and five acres with honeysuckle, roses, fruit trees. " 'Awake my soul and with the sun . . .' she sang as she cleaned." A satisfying epilogue, some years later—two "crazily painted notices—Pears For Sale—and Firewood Cheap"—lets us know that Weekly has survived, just as she wanted to. "It had become," this final chapter opens, "the fashion to buy land. All kinds of people were searching for week-end country properties . . . the price of land rose steadily. The township became more desolate as more and more country people, unable to make a living, moved to the city to find work . . ." A city man with a plan to use the local clay to make "special bricks," comes to make a deal. The now ancient Weekly makes him tea, shows him the property, including a suspicious mound looking something like a grave—"it was fenced roughly with pieces of old pipe and bits of wood and bark, some tin

[5]THE NEWSPAPER OF CLAREMONT STREET, by *Elizabeth Jolley*. Viking. $14.95.

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cans had been hammered flat and stuck into the clay. 'It's quite an art piece,' he said. 'Yerse,' Weekly agreed." Together they admire the new moon, and Jolley leads us through the flamey, lively last images to believe that not only has Weekly lived well, and will live on, but that she will probably become a brick tycoon too, and, still singing hymns, is mercilessly cleaning yet. A lovely book.

It is not entertaining, or beautiful, but perhaps the most daring, rule-breaking, and earnest novel in the group I'm reviewing is Carolyn Chute's second book *Letourneau's Used Auto Parts*,[6] which, like her first, *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, depicts the daily lives, at work and home, of the very poor in a small, present-day New England town. This time the characters are mostly Maine/French/Canadian, the brunt, perhaps I need to mention, of Downeast's version of ethnic jokes, those humorous light-bulb etc. stories about somebody else's racial or national I.Q. that embody a fairly overt fascination with genocide.

By the time this review appears, it should be clear whether or not the general hoo-ha will be as stupid as the reception of *The Beans*, which was widely mis-read and misunderstood. I hope this won't have happened again because these are brave books, delicate, difficult, and both of them very conscious tragedies, painstakingly crafted. They deserve better than being considered quaint folk-art produced by an accidentally literate "Bean," or titillating exposés of nouveau Snopeses, or "raw" anything. Also, Chute should be encouraged to continue to make art out of lives that have never been put into art before, much less into the novel which is, whatever its subject, style, or structure, a record of movement, recording the assumption that human life moves—in mind, body, fortune, whatever contains a potential for change. What distinguishes the physical and spiritual poverty of the lives she portrays, and her techniques of portrayal, is the paralysis of those lives as they are lived in reality.

I'm certain this will sound extreme because Chute (the person of the publicity, the work) seems so far from the centers of smartness, but what she does in her novels and short fiction is something like Warhol's film of the changing light on the Empire State Building. The building stands still; you could say that it simply repeats itself, frame after frame, and that the film, the art work, is a self-consciously doomed attempt to register the building's what-ness. Warhol's experiment defies the nature of film, plays with its conventions, is finally about the failure of film; and is an attempt to force upon the viewer, through sheer time and repetition, an experience of the real life tedium that art generally saves us from through its many techniques of distillation, selection, and its creation of the illusion of "realistic" movement. The building can be filmed, but the

[6]LETOURNEAU'S USED AUTO PARTS, by *Carolyn Chute*. Ticknor & Fields. $16.95.

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product isn't a film, if that makes sense. What happens in Chute's almost still-life of a novel does not take place in the characters' lives; what happens can only happen in the reader's mind in the movement of a deepening of sympathetic consciousness. It is as though we were forced by the presentation to stare at a building for X number of hours until the building finally entered our mind. The art work, in that case, moves *into* us, and that movement is accomplished in a gradual and cumulative way. Chute's people are lives that the novel has never told before, and perhaps cannot tell, because they are lives without a story that moves. They have, they are, only reiteration, like a truck stuck in mud up to its axles with its motor being gunned. Even the repeated actions in this novel—sex, food, drink, empty work, idle talk—may be metaphors for this outraged bewilderment.

What can the novel, when so many assumptions attend it, be used to do? In what ways can it dramatize—without betraying—the pain of life if that pain is experienced by people whose lives do not meet the basic requirements of the form? Letourneau père takes in every homeless old lady; they are all called "Tante" this or that, and they sit, on the front porch, rocking and observing and repeating their reduced movements of exertion. The sentence quoted above from Elizabeth Jolley's last chapter, "It had become the fashion to buy land," is also the situation in Chute's novel. However, the Letourneaus, their offspring, relatives, neighbors, are not the ones buying it but the ones being bought out. They can't afford to keep it, can't afford to buy anything else, and there is quite literally no place for them to live. Old Letourneau takes them in; they hunker in old trailers, his big house, condemned outbuildings, while the land speculation and New England development "boom" go on around them, driving them into smaller holes and increasingly make-shift corners, a "public nuisance," an "eyesore." Nevertheless, the same laws apply to the shacks as to the million-dollar condos with sea view, beach access. One law for all, as Custer patiently tried to explain to Red Cloud.

The people in this novel, not the discarded transmissions and broken mufflers, are the real "used parts" of the title, and these people are junk, they've been junked, they know they're junk; they are in the way of progress; they are an insult to the very idea of progress. They remind us of too much that is frail, limited, needy, always with us, and progress is going to bulldoze them under as punishment, just for existing. It is this situation, this plight, the "dilemma of humankind, the smallness, the silliness, the lack of forethought," and the rotten inhumanity of it all that Chute is writing about; and she is connecting things that must, in actual life, be connected, soon: exploitation of land, and human poverty; so-called "development," and human paralysis; distant power and big money, and somebody else's daily pain.

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TOM WILHELMUS

Knowing

> The philosophical novelist, or poet, is one for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images always fall into a dialectical configuration, for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience.
>
> —from Robert Penn Warren's "Introduction" to Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*

I AM THINKING ABOUT THE MANNER in which the following books display their relationship to knowing. While not all writers are necessarily philosophical and may differ in the manner in which they approach knowledge—some directly, others preferring to be surprised by it—all must express some relationship to it. Writing may be other things as well, but whether you agree with Auden, who called it "a game of knowledge," or one self-assured French philosopher who declared that literature stands midway between empirical fact and philosophical truth (giving himself the high ground), writing is also an act of knowing. Knowing has its fashions and its means, and I would like to think that fashion has changed in favor of work that has a little more faith in the ability of narrative alone to express or discover what we know—without labored philosophical or metafictional commentary. But knowledge can be about nearly anything, as long as it is personal. Conrad said it best; confronted by the "enigmatical spectacle" of existence, "the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts," but the artist "descends within himself [to find] the terms of his appeal." That seems inevitable if only because he must choose what to write about.

For instance, in Donald Barthelme's fiction, the great Modernist goal of investigating the very meaning of meaning, has become simply how to survive being drowned by it. Meaning, significance, is everywhere, proliferating, intruding. Like Todd Andrews, in John Barth's *The Floating Opera*, Barthelme has discovered that "Nature, coincidence, can be a heavy-handed symbolizer. She seems at times fairly to club one over the head with significance. . . . Really, to resist the temptation to use such ponderous, ready-made symbols taxes one's integrity." And like Barth and others of his generation (Woody Allen, Andy Warhol, Tom Wolfe, the *National Enquirer*), he is a master of style in the face of philosophical doubt. For while

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meaning may be everywhere, none of it actually *means* anything. Like Warhol, Barthelme has become one of the world's great collectors of high camp style, and his stories—Brechtian, Absurdist, surrealist, Chaplinesque—bristle with implication that style *is* meaning, the only meaning there is. Like an Ionesco play in which the stage slowly fills up with chairs, swollen limbs, or eggs, his works drown the truth (such as it is) in truths.

Of course, until recently this has been one of the most critically acclaimed forms of knowing, and Barthelme—in addition to being enormously popular—has won all the awards an American writer can aspire to in the seventies and eighties. His current volume, *Forty Stories*,[1] brings together stories from approximately twenty years of writing on topics covering art, fame, museums, popular and literary culture, language, education, celebrity, myth, religion and his familiar *critique de la vie quotidienne*. Like most Modernist fiction, these stories reject traditional narrative and employ other types of construction, including catechism, question and answer, interview, report, amusing combinations of text and illustration, epistle, dialogue, and simple list. Even when narrative does appear it is fractured and disjointed, a playful rending and stretching of genres and types as in the tale "Porcupines at the University" which, among other things, contains a porcupine roundup and drive to market in New York City.

Taken together, the stories create the peculiar heady feeling one associates with the avant-garde in which the narrator is amused, cerebral, aloof, apart paring his fingernails. Taken singly or in groups, however, they create a more personal impression, more in keeping with the artist's fear about being trapped by life in a sea of insanity. Thus, reminiscent of Yeats, a playwright creates out of the "broken bones of the heart" while his actors go around the corner for coffee and a Danish ("The Opening"). Or Goethe's genial musings are interrupted by Eckermann ("Conversations with Goethe"). Or Paul Klee draws an elegant drapery while fellow officers are puzzled about the airplane he has lost ("Engineer-Private Paul Klee Misplaces an Aircraft . . ."). And whatever it was that Tolstoy meant is drowned in "the 640,086 pages (Jubilee Edition)" of his work ("At the Tolstoy Museum"). True, the sufferings of the artist may only be part of a wider problem of celebrity in a mass culture where, as Warhol said, everyone is destined to be famous sometime for at least fifteen minutes. The danger is that everything famous, notorious, or merely well-known will become banal. Hence, "the most important tool of the genius in the modern world" is "rubber cement" ("The Genius"), Sinbad becomes a college professor ("Sinbad"), and Bluebeard's secret room contains zebras and gowns by Coco Chanel ("Bluebeard").

[1]FORTY STORIES, by *Donald Barthelme*. G. P. Putnam's Sons. $17.95.

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Two stories even appear to imply a, new to me, curiously *religious* exploration. "The Temptation of St. Anthony" and "January" (about a saintly man named Brecker) stand out among these stories because of an uncharacteristic *lack* of irony on Barthelme's part. Such evidence is slim indeed, but even if Barthelme were on the brink of some improbable conversion, his problem and ours would be like the old man's problem in Eliot's "Gerontion"—too much knowledge placed too late into weak hands. The more characteristic story, and the one that most reveals our true predicament as Barthelme sees it is "The Educational Experience," which posits a world rich with information (the Fisher King makes an appearance, as well as Wittgenstein and Sergeant Preston of the Yukon) but one too replete, too complex for clarity, value, or conviction. "Perplexities of this kind are not infrequent in our business," say the educators. "The important thing is the educational experience itself—how to survive it."

Another type of knowing that draws upon our self-conception as a nation appears to be the most important issue in Updike's new novel, *S.*[2] Although the premise he works from—that of a New England housewife seeking a divorce who has moved to an Arizona ashram—strikes me fully as bizarre as porcupines at the university, he does not appear to be baffled that such things might occur if only because of our heritage.

Updike's heroine, with her symbolic name—Sarah P. Worth (the "P" stands for "Prynne")—comes straight out of Hawthorne. How a twentieth-century Hester Prynne will fare among the Rashneeshi is a speculation for much amusement—raising interesting questions about the religious mania that first brought the Puritans to these shores and about one woman's right to define herself untroubled by social convention. What Hawthorne said of Hester, "The world's law was no law for her mind," applies equally well to Updike's heroine.

A failure to understand this emphasis—highlighting Sarah against a background of literary history—accounts, I think for some reviewers' claiming that Updike has committed a solecism by writing from a woman's point of view. And while I may question the novel's ending, I think only an entrenched feminism would argue that Sarah is not an interesting, and in this novel, the dominant character. The manner in which she writes and speaks, in this novel of epistles and tape recordings, is witty and intelligent, with all the polish of Updike's usual manner, and she clearly outshines everyone else in the novel.

More interesting than Sarah's feminism are her ideas about America. In a letter to her daughter about two-thirds through the novel, Sarah puts the issue most succinctly. Pearl (!), who is twenty-

[2]S., by *John Updike*. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

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one and relatively well-educated, is in danger, however, of marrying into a family of Dutch burghers and reverting to all the rigidities Americans left Europe to escape:

> The ones who stayed there chose to hang back from the great spiritual adventure America was and is. . . . The Europeans here at the ashram, most of whom have been deported or gone into hiding, were a fascinating study in how intelligent and attractive people could go through all the correct motions and yet all the time be *missing the point.* They kept trying to make a formal church or a military organization out of it all; the *delicacy* of our American reality keeps escaping them, the way our whole lovely nation is founded on the edge of a dream.

Sarah writes this while she is staying on Samana Cay in the Caribbean ("where some recent experts, working from the logs, think Columbus *really* landed").

In pursuit of her own "spiritual adventure," Sarah has landed in an Arizona ashram following the same kind of light that had attracted the New England brahmins a century before. And although the thoroughness with which Updike pursues his researches into this aspect of his novel—including a twelve-page glossary of Hindu and Buddhist terminology at the end—may seem to carry the joke too far, we might remember that the Transcendentalists themselves were considered rather dotty by their tough-minded Yankee neighbors. Therefore, while there may be something silly about the suburban yoga class as a path to nirvana, the picture is less risible when Sarah uses it as a means to self-reliance and independence.

I confess, therefore, to some dismay when Updike chose, in the last part of the novel, to make the leader of his religious community an outright fraud and to make Sarah's stay in the ashram simply a scheme for escaping her husband while gaining her share of the family wealth. Ultimately to make the guru just another self-promoting American huckster, a Jewish-Armenian boy named Steinmetz from Watertown, Massachusetts, and to surprise us by making his heroine's "delicate" spiritual adventure a quest for the family assets, is cynically to recast the American Dream as simply a form of greed. Nonetheless, Updike's approach to knowing interests me by the manner in which he can take an idea and not merely make it new but also test it, deftly, within a novel which otherwise seems meant only to entertain.

Two large, highly publicized novels—*Oscar & Lucinda* by Peter Carey and *The New Confessions* by William Boyd—also highly entertaining, are finally interesting, however, by their failure in their own efforts of knowing, In neither case, I suppose, will this "failure" constitute lack of financial success: it must be measured in how far each novel falls short of its own expectations.

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Carey's novel,[3] which its publicists claim is like John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* because of its "unerring re-creation of its historical time and place pervaded by a modern consciousness," is placed in the nineteenth century, and records the improbable love affair between two unlikely characters, an Anglican priest who ran away from his fundamentalist father and was raised and educated by his Anglican neighbors, and a woman factory owner who inherited from her own Victorian parents the means to go into the glassmaking business. Oscar and Lucinda share one fatal similarity: they both are compulsive gamblers. When they meet on shipboard, making the passage from England to Sydney, it is over a card table. Later, when he is defrocked for betting on horse races and she nearly loses the shop for similar misadventures, they briefly live together and devise the wager which motivates the final third of the novel.

An implausible story, *Oscar & Lucinda* nonetheless has its moments of high entertainment. Oscar's fundamentalist and natural historian father sums up, as it were, the contradictions of an age. And Carey is at his best when he describes Lucinda's efforts to establish herself as an independent woman in Victorian Australia. The ending of the novel, too, though completely at odds with the rest of the story, works neatly as a type of antiexpeditionary travelogue. Where the novel fails, then, is precisely in that dimension where *The French Lieutenant's Woman* had its strength. Unlike Fowles's novel, *Oscar & Lucinda* is a love story masquerading as an investigation into the Victorian past. Apart from some things we learn about nineteenth-century glassmaking and the manner for rigging out an expedition into the outback, there is practically no history we learn that cannot be inferred from the most generalized impressions of the age. Nothing in this novel approximates the complex dialogue between Victorian and Modern that permeates Fowles's book. And when, at one point, Oscar turns to Lucinda and explains, "Our whole faith is a wager, Miss Leplastrier. We bet—it is all in Pascal and very wise it is too, although the Queen of England might find him not nearly Presbyterian enough—we bet that there is a God," the book has come as far as it will get to suggesting a modern sensibility, a hint that the leaky bark of Victorian conventionality may be at sea in a hurricane. In this context, however, Oscar's statement is more thought-provoking as a rationalization for his and Lucinda's vice. Similarly the ending of the novel, which separates the lovers, is not modern so much as it is gratuitous in offending the lines of plot development the reader has been presented with up to that point.

William Boyd's novel[4] is more ambitious than *Oscar & Lucinda*

[3]OSCAR & LUCINDA, by *Peter Carey*. Harper & Row. $18.95.

[4]THE NEW CONFESSIONS, by *William Boyd*. William Morrow & Company. $18.95.

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and the product of a more accomplished novelist. It raises our expectations by attempting an elaborate comparison between the life of its hero, John James Todd, and a specific historical personage, the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. The Rousseau Todd and his creator are interested in, however, is not the intellectual contributor to the *Encyclopedia*, author of *The New Heloise*, *Emile*, and *The Social Contract*, but rather the old man Rousseau whose bitter book *The Confessions* strikes Todd as the expression of, "the first truly honest man. The first modern man . . . the life of the individual spirit recounted in all its nobility and squalor for the first time in the history of the human race." The challenge is to see, in other words, whether Todd, born in 1899 in Scotland, a doughboy, documentary filmmaker, and POW in World War I, a successful director in Germany during the twenties, a down-and-out creator of grade B movies in Hollywood in the forties, and a victim of the blacklist and possibly the murderer of his principal tormenter thereafter, can claim our attention as a twentieth-century avatar of Rousseau—whose book, which becomes Todd's obsession as a filmmaker, he had read as a prisoner of war.

Boyd's conception is ingenious. And readers will be caught musing on such things as the irony that a *verbal* text by Rousseau should fail on screen (thus destroying Todd's career) because of the introduction of *sound*. And they will appreciate the startling symmetry—Rousseau's *The Confessions*, Todd's confession, Todd's film of *The Confessions*, and William Boyd's *The New Confessions*—will have been achieved when Boyd's novel is itself made into a film. Finally, however, such ingenuity is more entertaining than profound. And whereas *The Confessions* of Jean Jacques Rousseau were flagrant and compelling precisely because they sharply contrasted with his intellectual stature, Todd has no such claims to our attention.

As a result, attention strays from Todd himself to the background information Boyd supplies—about the history of filmmaking or about France during The Great War, Germany in the twenties, Hollywood and Mexico during the forties and fifties. All this makes *The New Confessions* a well-researched, intelligent, and often entertaining book. But often this entertainment remains outside the story and becomes merely derivative. Can we guess, for instance, what alcoholic novelist inspired the following lines from Todd's down-and-out stay in Mexico?

> Some Mexican youths lounged outside a cinema that was showing *Los Manos de Orlac*. I saw an elderly German novelist and his wife return from their morose constitutional. A dog urinated against the whitewall tires of an old Ford. It was a warm night.

Other information seems only created for the film buff, and while such knowledge is not irrelevant, and may be entertaining, nonethe-

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less it is of a different order of interest because it is not dramatized through the lives of the characters.

While *Oscar & Lucinda* and *The New Confessions* are ambitious books, both of which deal to some extent with a knowledge of the past, a much more successful book in this vein is Jim Anderson's *Billarooby*,[5] a work which teaches as it entertains and convinces us that history does give shape and presence to our lives. A novel about childhood and a thinly disguised reminiscence, this book's greatest virtue is its point of view which allows the story to emerge from within the mind and imagination of an eleven-year-old boy. Perhaps because parts of Australia are like the American West, much of the novel reminds me of Ivan Doig's *This House of Sky* about growing up in Montana in the thirties and forties.

In a similar fashion *Billarooby* is both a portrait of a community, in this case an arid farming district in Australia during World War II, and the history of a family, focusing on the experience of Lindsay Armstrong, whose family has moved to Australia from England because of a tragedy in their past and because his father is unfit for military service. Lindsay's father suffers from much undefined guilt which has something to do with his marginal ability to provide for his family, to survive in these arid surroundings, his rejection from the service, and his relationship with his own father whose death hangs like a dark cloud over himself and Lindsay. As the novel opens, Lindsay encounters an escaped Japanese POW from a camp located nearby; and although he has only one brief—though nearly fatal—contact with the POW again, he builds what little he knows about the Japanese into a private retreat of honor and certainty which contrasts with the other dreams, doubts, and fears which make up his adolescent world. The tensions, too, which develop between other members of the family and the drought-inflicted wartime community—tensions marked by sexual revelation and political and racial conflict—awaken us once again to the hazards of knowing that exist in the passage from youth to maturity.

That the artist may not have known himself and may dramatize that unknowing is the intriguing conception of *Woodcutters*,[6] a recently-translated novel by the acclaimed Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard. Bernhard's novels are compulsively autobiographical, and this novel, in particular, is preceded by scandal, delayed in publication because of a suit brought by one of Bernhard's acquaintances who claims to have been slanderously portrayed in it.

The novel is the record of a late-night artistic dinner party at the home of the Auersbergers, one of Vienna's literary elite, following a performance of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. The guests comprise a small

[5]BILLAROOBY, by *Jim Anderson*. Ticknor & Fields. $17.95.

[6]WOODCUTTERS, by *Thomas Bernhard*. Trans. by *David McLintock*. Alfred A. Knopf. $15.95.

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salon who decide the fate of Viennese art but who are more adept at manipulating business, social, and governmental agencies than producing work themselves. At least this is the opinion of the narrator, ensconced in a wing chair from which he observes the others and their participation in a gathering that to him seems a sordid and ridiculous farce:

> Because they've made a name for themselves, won a lot of prizes, published a lot of books, and sold their pictures to a lot of museums, because they've had their books issued by the best publishing houses and their pictures hung in the best museums, because they've been awarded every possible prize that this appalling state has to offer and had every possible decoration pinned to their breasts, they believe they've become something, though in fact they've become nothing.

As a result, "Vienna is a terrible machine for the destruction of genius," he thinks. "An appalling recycling plant for the demolition of talent."

Part of the pleasure of reading such a work comes from our cherished conviction that indeed artistic careers *are* fostered in this manner—making us even more willing to believe that in this case the novel actually is a thinly disguised *roman à clef*. We are also more willing to believe that the narrator has shunned his former friends for twenty years and has only come to the party because he accidentally met them that day on the way to the funeral of a mutual acquaintance. On the other hand, I am told the literary dinner party is a familiar convention of Austrian literature, and these characters seem more like types than portraits—including the narrator who is far from a sympathetic creation. Thus, depending upon the quality of David McLintock's translation, even the tediousness of the style appears intentionally alienating, and the text, comprised of 181 repetitive, circular, and sometimes boring pages takes on the quality of a tour de force.

The plot of the novel turns on the arrival of the actor for whom the party is being given. At first the narrator is repelled, once again, by a man who appears equally shallow and egotistical, a poseur mouthing the words of others. Nonetheless, as the evening progresses, the actor wins the narrator's grudging respect as a person who also suffers from the oppressive artificiality of these surroundings and wishes for something more natural: "*The forest, the virgin forest, the life of a woodcutter.*" This phrase transforms the actor in the eyes of the narrator, "from a gargoyle into a philosophical human being," and this transformation, along with the memory of the dead mutual friend, awakens a brief and highly-qualified admission that "Vienna, which I found detestable and had always found detestable, was suddenly once again the best city in the world."

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Personally, I find *Woodcutters* as persuasive—and perhaps finally as sympathetic to its countrymen—as Joyce's "The Dead." Both works contain the same sense of isolation and hatred of pretense, the same dread of social gatherings, the same memory of warmer and more hospitable times, and the same longing for what is passionate and natural. Both contain the same reconciling force of the dead who bind the characters together, however briefly, in mutual sympathy.

Finally, then, a brief note on a novel, *The Immortal Bartfuss*[7] by Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld, in which the desire not to express what one knows seems much of the issue. To be sure, writing is an act of knowing: to say, as Mr. Appelfeld does in a recent issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, that a survivor of the Holocaust is reduced to silence about his experiences is not to say that speech is impossible but rather to make the current condition of the survivor—his nullity, his muteness—the focus of our attention.

Nonetheless, the withdrawal of speech from the principal character's repertoire of responses makes *The Immortal Bartfuss* a gravely laconic book—parable-like, portentous—even though Bartfuss' life is reduced and circumscribed to a beach, a family from whom he is estranged, some acquaintances among other survivors who seem similarly striken, afternoons in cafes. It is not true, however, that Bartfuss lacks will or intelligence or that he is simply depressed or withdrawn. At one point he promises that, "Now he would devote himself to the general welfare, he would mingle, inspire faith in people overcome by many disasters." At another point he says, "I expect greatness of soul from people who understand the Holocaust." He longs to converse with others, to be a father to his estranged daughter, to display politeness. "Excuse me for using the word 'I' so emphatically," he says. But finally, "Bartfuss recalled that someone told him, in another context, that the words that had served us before were now prohibited, like a forbidden indulgence." The lesson I take it of such a statement, the knowing, is not that of nothingness, of no meaning, or even of too much meaning; but rather of meaning in which knowing is overwhelmed by an "urgency of experience" so great that it exhausts the inquiry—although that lesson itself becomes a "generalization about values" in this singular, apocalyptic work.

[7]THE IMMORTAL BARTFUSS, by *Aharon Appelfeld*. Trans. by *Jeffrey M. Green*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. $15.95.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Anyone for Tennyson?

ONE OF THE FAVORITE CARD GAMES OF MY YOUTH was *Authors*, a variant of *Fish* (or *Go Fish*). Its deck was composed of various English and American literary worthies, each of whom was represented by four titles, and the idea of the game was to amass more "books" of authors than your opponents. It was here I first encountered—if that is the correct word—Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Nobody before 1800 was allowed in except Shakespeare; no woman managed to make the club except one (token?) Louisa May Alcott. Its most recent authors were Twain and Stevenson, but the one who captivated my imagination was stately, dark, magnificently bearded Alfred, Lord Tennyson (I simply assumed "Lord" was his middle name), author—so his four cards individually announced—of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Brook," "Idylls of the King," and "Crossing the Bar." Though the Tennyson foursome counted no more than any other packet, I felt especially satisfied when I was in a position to snare it and could demand of my opponent, "Give me 'Crossing the Bar' " or (knowing the answer already) "Do you have 'Idylls of the King'? " Somehow Tennyson felt like money in the bank.

Yet it never occurred to me to read these or any other of his poems, and for some reason Tennyson, like the other English nineteenth-century poets, got left out of our grammar school English classes where we read James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier and other fireside American Classics, cordially detested by most members of the class. So it wasn't until college that I discovered *In Memoriam* (or parts of it), and not until graduate school that a real acquaintance with his work began under the gentle hand of Douglas Bush. Bush admired the poet, partly I think as a defiance of the New Criticism and of modernism generally. For in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), T.S. Eliot had pronounced Tennyson's epitaph with the cleverly turned, "But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated." What could a poet do worse than ruminate? Even before that, in writing to Harriet Monroe about how poetry had to be as well-written as prose, Pound had forbidden any more "Tennysonianness of speech; nothing—nothing you couldn't in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say." And while Frost wasn't exactly

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a modernist, he had insisted that the Tennysonian track of "effects in assonation" was "the wrong track or at any rate . . . a short track," and that he, Frost, was headed down a new track ("the sound of sense"). Eventually, in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), F.R. Leavis codified such insights into Tennyson's limitations by labeling him "literary and Alexandrian" and charging him with major responsibility for the nineteenth-century cult of the "poetical"—with the creation of a dream world and a general unhealthy escapism.

Suddenly, in 1936, Eliot published his essay "*In Memoriam*," which began with the astonishing declaration that "Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear." Those reasons were that his work showed "abundance, variety, and complete competence," that he had the finest ear of any English poet since Milton, and that his masterpiece, *In Memoriam*, was a great poem—though because of the quality of its doubt rather than its faith ("*In Memoriam* is a poem of despair, but of despair of a religious kind"). So this "great master of metric as well as of melancholia" had, with a stroke, been rehabilitated, fittingly enough by the man who fifteen years previously helped effect his dislodgment from the high poetic throne. With Eliot's blessing, one of the deans of New Criticism, Cleanth Brooks, set about to show why "Tears, Idle Tears" was a great lyric rather than, as Leavis had insisted in a chilly phrase, one which offered "emotion for its own sake without a justifying situation." From Brooks it was only a step to Hugh Kenner, who despite his Poundian disapproval of "Tennysonianness of speech" wrote an essay in which he put forth Tennyson as a symbolist precursor of *The Waste Land* and *Finnegans Wake*.[1]

During the past two decades, the level of Tennyson criticism has been raised mightily, mainly through the force of Christopher Ricks: first with his 1969 edition of the poems; then his 1972 critical biography. Now Mr. Ricks has brought out in three volumes a second edition of the poems, this one incorporating the Trinity College manuscripts from which scholars were forbidden to quote at the time of the earlier edition.[2] The new edition is only a couple of hundred pages longer than the earlier one, but will take up a bit more shelf space. The most astonishing thing about it—as with its predecessor—is that Ricks seems to have accomplished it all more

[1] Brooks's essay, "The Motivation of Tennyson's Weeper," may be found in *The Well-Wrought Urn* (New York, 1947), pp. 153–162. Leavis's animadversions on "Tears, Idle Tears" occur, most recently in *The Living Principle* (New York, 1975), pp. 75–79. At one point he warns us that "habitual indulgence of the kind represented by *Tears, idle tears* . . . would be, on grounds of emotional and spiritual hygiene, something to deplore." (I remember a similar warning about masturbation in a Boy Scout Handbook from my youth.) Kenner's essay, "Some Post-Symbolist Structures," is in *Literary Theory and Structure*, ed. by Brady, Palmer, and Price (New Haven, 1973), pp. 379–393.

[2] THE POEMS OF TENNYSON, in three volumes, ed. by *Christopher Ricks*. University of California Press. $225.00.

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or less single-handedly, with the help of a few libraries. (There are no acknowledgments of lucrative fellowships, devoted research assistants—the sort of thing that for American scholars usually goes with the territory.) The lifting of the restrictions on copying or quoting from the Trinity College manuscripts has made it possible for Ricks to record many MS variants, though he has not attempted to record them all (such an edition would be, he says, "enormously valuable but also enormous"). Ricks's good sense in using the Trinity material comes out nicely when he remarks that "The editor has tried to resist the temptation to find the Trinity MSS more interesting (than, say, the good old Harvard ones) simply because they used to be under interdiction." He has also brought up to date the critical commentary on individual poems, adding to or revising each headnote to individual poems in the light of recent scholarship. A single example: the note to "Ulysses" in the first edition ended by referring to a 1963 article summarizing various arguments about whether or not we were to find Tennyson's hero in that poem altogether noble. We are now directed to two further articles on the subject, to another article about the Homeric and Dantean backgrounds of "Ulysses," to a further one suggesting as a source Samuel Daniel's "Ulysses and the Siren," and finally to an article in *Tennessee Studies in Literature* (not a publication everyone keeps up with) arguing that Byron is as much a source for the poem as Dante. So a stanza from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is quoted and the reader is directed to an allusion to Byron—noted in Ricks's first edition—in Tennyson's line "I am a part of all that I have met."

Since Ricks has the subtlest ear for allusion and the most well-stocked memory for English poetry of any critic alive, it is a privilege to watch him listening to and recording the operations of England's most literary poet. In case there are those who distrust "source hunting" in an editor, the following sentences from his preface show how sensitive he is to the uses and misuses of such activity:

> The footnotes cite many parallel passages. As in any annotated edition these illustrate a range of possible likenesses. At one end is conscious allusion to another poet; then unconscious reminiscence; then phrasing which is only an analogue and not a source. Some of the instances cited here are probably analogues, not sources, but they are cited because Tennyson's phrasing can be illuminated by the comparison.

He then notes Tennyson's own contempt for certain kinds of source-hunters: "They will not allow one to say 'Ring the bell' without finding that we have taken it from Sir P. Sidney, or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean 'roars' without finding out the precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarised it (fact)". Aware of the force of this grumble, Ricks's editorial

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procedure is a mixture of discretion and boldness. Publicity material on the back cover of these volumes speaks of the edition as "one of the great achievements of modern editorial scholarship." Never was the adjective "great" less idly used; to read and study Ricks's notes to "Mariana," "The Lady of Shalott," "Tithonus," and the rest (which I have barely begun to do) is to open up Tennyson in unexpected ways and to widen the scope of one's mind. It feels like what undergoing a liberal education must feel like—or so this liberally educated reader felt.

Tennyson once remarked casually at a London dinner table, "I don't think that since Shakespeare there has been such a master of the English language as I"; then, as the guests looked embarrassed, added, "To be sure, I've got nothing to say." Ricks's 1972 critical biography was really the first book to focus seriously on the "saying," especially on the way Tennyson's poems characteristically recede from their affirmations and make a business (and a pleasure) out of not concluding, even as they talk about the necessity for concluding—on the way Tennysonian mellifluousness shapes and distorts the "statements" made by the poems. Since Ricks's there have been several useful and unapologetic studies of the poetry, culminating, so it appears to me, in Herbert F. Tucker's remarkable account of it up through *Maud*.[3] Although it is probably a mistake to speak of any critical work on a poet as "definitive," one feels, upon finishing Mr. Tucker's dense and difficult book, that it will be some time before another one on Tennyson's major poems is needed.

Tucker shows how Tennyson's poetry both exhibits and helps call into being "the doom of romanticism." He extends and consolidates some of Ricks's notions about the un-concludingness of Tennysonian narratives, but also places the poet in larger contexts of history—literary history, but also political and social—exploring in particular and patient detail Tennyson's transformations of earlier nineteenth-century poets, especially Keats and Shelley. One of his aims—I would call it the book's central aim—is "to tell the story of the life of Tennyson's texts to midcareer, and thereby to practice specifically *literary* biography." Tucker wants to be, and I think admirably succeeds in being, both historical and critical, thus avoiding mere "context-setting"—the attempt to understand a poem by submitting it to some structure external to it—and mere "close reading" that would treat the poems as historically and biographically context-less.

He also wants to distinguish himself from the New Critical and "modernist" responses to Tennyson: some sentences from his extremely fertile introduction to Part I stake out the ambitiousness of his critical enterprise:

[3] TENNYSON AND THE DOOM OF ROMANTICISM, by *Herbert F. Tucker*. Harvard University Press. $37.50.

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> The dissociation of sensibility; the movement to rewrite Romantic and Victorian literary history in the mode not of comprehension but of indictment; the symbolist aim to purify the dialect of the tribe; the imagist aim to effect a fusion of thought and feeling somewhere, anywhere, outside the field of a historical relevance: these were powerfully attractive, mutually supportive modernist myths. They allowed two generations of poets and critics to wink at Tennyson's authority among them—inescapable though it then was, and largely uncharted though it still is—by regarding the result of his path-breaking work in the integration of lyric impulse and public responsibility as, on balance, a road better not taken by poets in the modern world. The soil of history had defiled Tennyson's gift; and more was the pity exquisitely savored by a succession of patronizing heirs, whom we in our decades succeed, and now and then patronize, in turn.

The elegant and witty authority of this writing characterizes Tucker's book throughout and makes reading it a pleasure, though of an exceptionally strenuous sort: there are no "easy" pages, and the analyses of particular poems are uniformly long, packed, and somewhat unremitting in tone—which is not to deny the pervasive and salutary ironic humor Tucker often brings to them.

The "doom of romanticism" of the book's title has among other references a direct one to the language with which *Maud* ends (Tucker's book also ends with a most searching reading of that difficult poem, on which I may finally be getting a handle):

> It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill;
> I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,
> I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned.

This is the hero's desperate attempt to come to terms with his own madness; but Tucker sees Tennyson's poetic career as "a series of just such submissions to an inevitable doom." The stylistic efforts of the poems are ingenious responses to a central conviction of powerlessness:

> When there is everything to be endured and nothing to be done [the phrase is Matthew Arnold's], endurance will be a leading virtue; the index of a speaker's strength will be the deepening stasis of a mood; and action will take the strictly subordinate place it takes in Tennyson's poetry.

Although in such poems as "The Gardener's Daughter" or "Enoch Arden," Tennyson showed that he could tell a "proper story" and artfully exploit an audience's taste for "moving" narration, his deeper bent was in another direction:

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> Something about the stories he tells best, in their climactic emphasis on inhibitions or their diffuse sense of breakdown, scandalizes the assumption behind critical metaphors of narrative "development" and "progression." Something opposes the thrust of narrative and deflects the poetry in an allegorical direction that has made readers since Walter Bagehot suspect that, whatever a Tennyson poem is ostensibly about, its real subject lies elsewhere.

Tennyson's imagination "was reluctant to believe in the efficacy of human action," and such reluctance is a feature (as both Ricks and Tucker have shown) of some of his most beautiful poems; from the early "Song" ("A Spirit Haunts the Year's Last Hours"), to "Mariana," "The Lady of Shalott," "The Lotos-Eaters," "Ulysses," "Tithonus," all the way to "Crossing the Bar." In that final utterance (or so Tennyson asked that it stand in his work), the departing passenger would have no "moaning of the bar" when he puts out to sea,

> But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
> Too full for sound and foam,
> When that which drew from out the boundless deep
> Turns again home.

Death is the ultimate denier of human action's efficacy, but Tennyson could write a poem in which a subtle inward action is achieved. Henry James, while not speaking of "Crossing the Bar," shrewdly defined that action as follows: "When he wishes to represent movement, the phrase always seems to me to pause and slowly pivot upon itself, or at most to move backward"—as in the above stanza the "that which drew" eventually "Turns again home."

If it does not sound like a putdown under the guise of a pat, I shall venture to call *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* the best sort of lit crit high-tech operation. Tucker's scrupulosity about recording every allusion or indebtedness to his critical predecessors extends to slightly disfiguring his own text with parenthetical references to them—so a sentence may close with "(Armstrong 1982, 183; Peltason 1985a, 43)." He has read, assimilated, and made use of when appropriate just about every piece of writing on Tennyson over the last century and a half, and he has been especially assiduous in acknowledging his immediate forebears. It is by no means a book to read in an evening, and most readers—even ones fairly devoted to Tennyson—may be tempted to skip sections on, say, "Fatima" or "Dora." But the temptation should be resisted, since whether the poem in question is a favorite or not, familiar or not-so-familiar, if one reads it through, then reads Tucker's account of it, one inevitably comes away generously repaid. Whatever reservations he has about the contextlessness of New Critical readings, the readings in this book—I think especially of "Mariana," "Ulysses,"

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"Morte D'Arthur," and *Maud*—are as close, as delicate, and as exhaustive as I have ever seen readings to be—and I *do* mean "ever."

"You know that any day I would as soon kill a pig as write a letter," wrote Tennyson in a letter to some "friends over the sea." That sentence is about the best opening I've seen recently, and suggests how formidably entertaining a correspondent he could have been and occasionally was.[4] This second volume of letters covers the first twenty of the Laureate years, and they do not fully reveal "the soul within" ("For words, like Nature, half reveal / And half conceal the soul within," *In Memoriam*, v). Still I was delighted with how he treated the birth of his two sons. After his and Emily's first child died stillborn, he wrote to a friend about his (Tennyson's) suffering, noting that he "refused to see the little body at first, fearing to find some pallid abortion which would have haunted me all my life—but he looked (if it be not absurd to call a newborn babe so) even majestic in his mysterious silence after all the turmoil of the night before." Then when a year or so later Hallam was born, he wrote joyously to Monckton Milnes about how "the little sensual wretch roaring day and night" was depriving his wife (though not he himself?) of any sleep. When his second son, Lionel, was born, "a lusty young fellow," he notes how this infant "strikes the elder one with awe, sometimes into sympathetic tears, sometimes into a kind of mimic bleating, when he hears the younger one's inarticulate cooings." But at that moment he thinks again of the dead first child, "really the finest boy of the three," who "lay like a little warrior, having fought the fight and failed, with his hands clenched, and a frown on his brow." The vitality and energy of a poet spills out from these sentences.

Much of this second volume—as of the previous one—is taken up with letters and journal accounts about Tennyson, or with letters from his wife to various people describing the great man's comings and goings. Clough called him, flatly, "an unmannerly simple big child of a man"; but Hawthorne was uncharacteristically overwhelmed by seeing him at the Manchester Arts Treasures Exhibition: "of middle-size, rather slouching, dressed entirely in black, and with nothing white about him except the collar of his shirt, which methought might have been clean the day before. . . . His face was very dark . . . His eyes were black; but I know little of them as they did not rest on me, nor on anything but the pictures. He seemed as if he did not see the crowd nor think on them, but as if he defended himself from them by ignoring them altogether." Perhaps this is how Hawthorne himself yearned to appear; at any rate, he says, "Gazing at him with all my eyes, I liked him well, and

[4] THE LETTERS OF ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON, Volume II: 1851–1870, ed. by *Cecil Y. Lang* and *Edgar F. Shannon, Jr.* Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. $35.00.

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rejoiced more in him than in all the other wonders of the Exhibition." But there are also glimpses of our poet in a more, one might say, relaxed mood, as when he is visited in Farringford by an American preacher who, after dinner on a stormy evening proceeds to his inn, accompanied by the Laureate who, while directing the guest, loses his bearings:

> Bidding me walk close behind him, we went forward through the mud, when suddenly I found myself precipitated six or seven feet downward. Sitting in the mud, I called on the poet to pause, but it was too late; he was speedily seated beside me. This was seeing the Laureate of England in a new light, or rather, hearing him under a novel darkness.

For Tennyson proceeded to make himself heard, improvising "an amusing run of witticisms" delivered in a deep bass voice which "came through the congenial darkness like mirthful thunder," and crying out (in what tone we can guess) "That this should have happened after dinner . . . do not mention this to the temperance folk." Doubtless the port had gone round, yes.

These letters take us into a different world, and why else do we read the letters of dead writers? In the "Afterword" to Herbert Tucker's book, he considers the bitter "generational disappointment" which post-World War I writers and readers felt with Tennyson ("Lawn Tennyson" in Stephen Dedalus's scornful *mot*) whose voice could evoke, as if it knew what it was talking about, "One far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves." But Tucker focuses on the largeness of expectation out of which that disappointment was bred:

> Here, for once, a poet ranked among the *acknowledged* legislators of mankind. The wholesale revulsion that set in against Victoria's laureate, and against the culture he represented in the popular mind, attests to the depth, breadth, and immediacy of the influence once wielded through Tennyson, for better or worse, by the art of poetry itself. With its thoroughgoing rejection of the "poetic"—that is, of Tennysonian melodiousness and rhetoric—postwar culture in effect bestowed on poetry, for the first and probably last time in modern experience, the immense compliment of taking it seriously.

Taking Tennyson seriously, and not solemnly, is what these scholarly and critical presentations of him help us to do.

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ROBERT McDOWELL

The Crisis of Subjects

FROM SEPTEMBER 1985 TO AUGUST 1987, Ken Smith served as writer-in-residence to Her Majesty's Prison, Wormwood Scrubs, where he worked "mostly with life sentence inmates of D Wing." For the title of his new book[1] Smith adopts the prison's name, which itself was inspired by an hallucinogenic herb, also known as green ginger, said to have grown on the Scrubs. The book's preface also reminds us that wormwood is the star's name in Revelation whose falling ushers in Armageddon.

Mindbending trip or end of the world, the prison is a shrine to loneliness that serves to isolate male violence ("the boy in me still / bawling for love, and in me the animal / prowling"). Alone in their cells the prisoners acknowledge "the sad nights of the masturbators," sweat out their repetitious, thorough memories of how they got there (often, in some warped sense, for love), and yearn for the world that goes on without them. "Grieving the years out," making "a room in the wind / where the days grow tired of each other," they listen to "many voices / failing in first person singular."

The narrator's remarkable accomplishment in these nineteen poems is not that he evokes sympathy for these incarcerated individuals, most of whom no doubt deserve to be there; it is not that his pounding rhythms and objective observations create the grand landscape of human hope and despair. Smith does these things, but he also conjures up the shadowy common ground shared by the criminal and lucky innocent.

In "The Rope," for instance, a man grimly examines the stages of his life: "Whoever I was once / a boy that began tangling string / I was never innocent from the start / everyone my toy everyone my tuppence." Looking back it seems like "one great tatter of strings," and he tries hard to make sense of it by following one thread

> Back into the museum of marriages
> along the clogged thread of weddings
> she and I each other's business
> each the other's final telegram.
>
> Each other's audience each other's movie . . .

[1] WORMWOOD, by *Ken Smith*. Bloodaxe Books, distributed in the U.S. by Dufour Editions. $11.95p.

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This life review never eludes the wrong decisions, the sudden unexpected turns that marked him. Waking up at poem's end, he realizes that he has been dreaming "the rope that will hang him at last."

In "A Theme of Razors," a character contemplates suicide, fearing "the man I met at morning / in the mirror's frame." The swift progression of syntax and plot is terrifying, and it is a relief when the survival instinct kicks in: "I stop the blood / and wipe my blue eyed double's face."

Endurance, survival, and patience are stressed again and again in these powerful poems from "the house of green ginger" where, if one is lucky, one's cell has a view "east over wire and the wind and the wall / to the nurses' home and the city beyond—". In such cadences Smith most resembles the hard-boiled American romantic balladeer Tom Waits.

Though I would like to quote practically every line from this grand book, I'll conclude with these from "At the Solstice."

> Years back
> in the paranoid self of myself
> I recall in the seventyeight of it all
> I would have killed a man and been here
> meeting myself a prisoner on no road
> anywhere a record no one listens to
> a book no one reads any more my gear
> out of style all the jokes out of date.

The outsider enters the prison and thinks of his own luck. One readily detects the humility and compassion in these lines, but one also senses the relief, the hair standing on end on the neck of the narrator's life. The *whole* life. Superb poetry like Ken Smith's gives us that.

Another intriguing publication from England's Bloodaxe Books is Alan Wearne's *Out Here.*[2] A poet described as having "the most original style in Australian poetry," Wearne begins with an almost melodramatic scene. Seventeen-year-old Brett Viney knifes himself in the school lavatory and staggers into his teacher's classroom clutching his stomach. In nine relentless free verse dramatic monologues, the characters directly affected by this incident, including the catalyst, speculate on its causes and ramifications and fill in the history surrounding the event.

First to bear witness is Lucy Martinson, the teacher who calls the ambulance, then the parents, bracing herself against "that untranslatable language: / the marriage brawl." From her we learn that Brett's home life is dicey; his parents are going through a divorce. As she copes with her own guilt, she ponders the bleak reality of

[2] OUT HERE, by *Alan Wearne.* Bloodaxe Books, distributed in the U.S. by Dufour Editions. $11.95p.

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children whose home role models are less than stellar, children who must find "the stupid courage to try being / a person with parents."

Next up in this narrative of accumulation and indirection is the victim's mother, who "had kids not opinions." A part-time worker, hers has been a lifelong struggle to reconcile opposites—herself with her charismatic, philandering husband, her successful, domineering father with her left-leaning activist sister, her image of what family life should be and its anxiety-ridden reality.

We also hear from Russ, her salesmanager husband, Russ's girlfriend Cheryl, Brett's maternal grandfather, a master builder, his mother's youngest sister, his girlfriend, her father, and Brett himself.

Though Wearne's syntax is occasionally awkward, his line breaks unjustified, he succeeds overall in presenting a compelling chronicle of suburban Australian life. His cast of characters, in many ways so familiar to American suburbanites, possess the integrity and surprises we associate with literature's finest players. In the best sense, they are reminiscent of the inhabitants of George Crabbe's timeless village. Central to their appeal is their emotional depth and strong awareness of the societal roles they play. With enviable insight, Wearne pays close attention to the importance of work in the lives he's revealing. Thus Brett's grandfather might be speaking for all of the characters when he interrupts his musing on his daughters' troubles to say "So you built and then you built. / Prefab and weatherboard moved into creambrick. / I made the east."

What one builds in a life so seldom resembles what one imagined in the beginning. Survival depends on anticipating change, the modern fragility of Career and Family. But the building is essential. That is the message of *Out Here*, and it is driven home with gritty optimism by the father of Brett's girlfriend, whose monologue closes the book:

> but Tracey it wasn't dreadful, I mean
> just your father speaking, I,
> clearing the, shit it's a botch daughter
> O Tracey it's all right,
> it's all right, everything is going to be, all right.

Out Here is a book of rich chatter. In his introduction, Michael Heyward points to "the Victorian experimenters in narrative verse and dramatic monologue—Browning, Meredith, Clough," as its true precursors. This seems accurate. Alan Wearne has discovered, as a number of younger American poets have, that narrative forms can rejuvenate both the subject matter and the impact of poetry.

In contrast, Phyllis Janowitz in her third book[3] proves herself

[3] TEMPORARY DWELLINGS, by *Phyllis Janowitz*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $16.95; $8.95.

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adept at writing what has been our standard successful poem for the last three decades. By this I mean that *Temporary Dwellings* has the air of the exuberant writing workshop. Declarative statements, lists, and the image-making impulse of the surrealist focus on the family and home. If subjects for poems are scarce, the routine of the day-to-day and fun with words will suffice.

> M & Ms begat a cigarette-butt begat his
> head on your . . . But what are you
> begetting and what might be begat
>
> by such beguiling begetting should you
> begin in such a setting, a setting meant
> for settling in?
> "Soliloquy in an Empty Hall"

The impulse to play is ever present. Dogs, cooking, family vacations, and the ups and downs of raising children recur. When Janowitz's sense of humor randomly clicks, as it does in "The Flea," we are treated to the romping cadences of an imagination immersed in small particulars. But too often the rhyming word play flattens out to a predictable sameness. This suggests that the collection could have been stronger if the poet and editor had cut the manuscript down by a third. As it is, the tone of the book is so unrelenting that occasional flashes of morbidity seem refreshing.

> . . . my sister
> and I cut swastikas between
> our eyebrows and dress in
> shrouds. Calling ourselves
> Dad and Mum, we jab each
> other with kitchen forks.
> "Squeaky Nursery Tunes"

This passage, and a few others like it, suggest that Janowitz is capable of doing more in a poem than coyly scratching the surface. Unfortunately, poets now are all too often encouraged to treat the poem's content superficially. If one embraces such encouragement, even with good humor, one settles for a modest achievement.

Similar problems dog Michael Burkard's sixth volume of poetry.[4] Preoccupied with loss and the longing for love, his method is to trust the offhanded complexity of free association. Getting a lot of mileage out of primary poetic elements of the natural world like *moon*, *stars*, *night*, and especially *rain*, and traditional images of separation and alienation such as *windows*, *doors*, and *trains*, Burkard,

[4] FICTIONS FROM THE SELF, by *Michael Burkard*. W. W. Norton. $15.95.

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like his American Surrealist and Deep Image precursors more than two decades ago, aims to surprise the reader, to force upon him a new set of associations within a sequence of instructions and assertions.

This is Burkard's intention, but the ten lines of "Mr. Hook" are the truest expression of his talent:

> mr hook died, i sought
> refuge from women in
> other women. i thought
> of my father and i
> thought of alcohol,
>
> i did not know whether
> this was my father thinking
> or alcohol thinking, but I knew
> it was not his alcohol,
> it was mine, my thought.

Like e. e. cummings, the poet these lines stylistically echo, Burkard at his best is a romantic miniaturist capable of putting in high relief the blurred edges of the snapshot scene he's making. He can even extend this talent, on occasion, over many lines, as he does in "I Can Tell You I Was Very Sad to Receive Your Piece of Sentiment," a good love poem about lost love. But the usual fare in this collection, which is divided into three catagories from the periods 1978–1982, 1982–1985, and 1985–1986, most often fails to make believable and important odd assertions such as "men who lift their / tits to the sky are / nervous" or "I spent the morning / reading about geese and death, and somehow feel / I will never be the same."

Another serious shortcoming surfaces when the poet tries to tell stories but only describes them. I think, for example, of "The Laundry Worker," a static monologue of declarative sentences that presents neither character nor natural speech. To make matters worse, when the poet speaks of others he does so almost clinically, being too careful to keep himself at a safe emotional distance. The result is that we cannot clearly see or feel for the people he's writing about.

Finally, the book's major problem may be that it gives us the impression it contains virtually every poem the author has not yet presented in other books. Had the volume been considerably pared down, it might have done justice to the poet's abilities. As it is, it puts me in mind of a scene from a 1939 Sherlock Holmes film. Referring to an elegant lady of the upper class, Holmes says "she is eminently respectable, but she gives the kind of party one comes away from with a feeling that one hasn't been anywhere."

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In contrast, Dick Allen's compact fourth book of poems[5] presents a refreshing and serious diversity that is uncommon in our poetry. Equally at home working in traditional forms or free verse, Allen's primary narrative style highlights his lyric and meditative gifts. Thus he takes his place among poets who insist that poems present subjects and themes capable of reaching and moving the tribe.

Aside from Allen's supple diction, his chief strength resides in his superb powers of observation, a keen eye for the minute particulars of daily life and peripheral vision that any basketball player would envy. This and the poems' roots in a specific time and place allow the poet to push past the conventional treatment of domestic memory.

Many of these poems, such as "Evening Train" and "Night Sledding," are evocations of boyhood in the late forties and an American town life that is rapidly vanishing. They do not celebrate as much as they set the record straight, recalling complete characters and the complicated mechanics of life. In "The Postmaster," for example, the narrator remembers his father going out of his way every day to deliver a widow's mail and befriending "The Coshburns, / our town's richest family, its only blacks, so spurned / By our neighbors, so envied . . ." and the "Hirosharas, he back from the camps." The poem accurately depicts the town's contradictory neighborliness and prejudice. "Of the Deaths that Precede Ours" tells the story of the futile attempts to save a boy who fell through the ice. The narrator is troubled to realize that he cannot remember much about his dead peer. Confronting the depth, or lack of it, he discovers in himself, he sets off through the woods and ends with the natural, futile gesture of splattering the trunks of oaks with snowballs, testing his pitching arm. The scene is notable for its lack of self-pity, its depiction of the restless, inarticulate condition of grief.

This poet excels at rendering just the appropriate gesture, the overlooked but essential act of a private drama (see the children in "The Workers" climbing their father's belly as he lies exhausted on the couch "pretending he was dead," or the girl in "Adirondack Town: An Idyll" who comes out on her porch when she hears someone singing, "Her face a weeping petal in a woolen cowl"); he also succeeds at reminding us how the natural world settles down after dramatic action, as in "The Clergyman's Wife Composes a Spring Letter": "But something is leaving us—the foliage behind it / Closing, as after a horseman riding through deep forest." This sweeping, silent moment, so like the moments that succeed the insignificant and significant acts of our lives, is essential in the ambitious poems that would tell our stories.

In addition to his sensitive and unyielding observation, Allen

[5] FLIGHT AND PURSUIT, by *Dick Allen*. Louisiana State University Press. $6.95p.

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swims against the fashionable poetic current by presenting a vein of humor that pokes fun at the narrator as much as it lampoons other characters. I think here of "The Poet at Eighteen," "The Swing," a lovely companion to Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz," and the self-assured vulnerable humor in the monologue "The Physicist to His Lost Love."

In "Cliff Painting," perhaps the most memorable poem of the book, all of Allen's admirable qualities come together. In this dramatic monologue a man "with a beer belly, sitting at a bar" reminisces about the time his high school girlfriend urged him to scale a well-known local cliff and spray-paint their love on its face. He agrees, but as he climbs higher and higher, "At some risk of death," he realizes that he hadn't thought it out enough. It begins to drizzle, and thinking of what the girl will say if he fails he pushes on. Later, after he succeeds and anyone looking up can see them though "the heart looks like a kidney," they break up at a drive-in. The girl's last request and the narrator's response are classic and appropriate.

She even wanted me

To climb again, to paint us over, and I laughed.
No way, I told her. Often I think of her trundling with her kids
And husband through the valley, and she glances

Up and there she is, with me again, forever
Linked with me upon the mountainside . . . I'm glad I did it.
That's love for you. And also, that's revenge.

Allen Hoey's first full-length collection,[6] published in 1987 and selected in 1985 by Galway Kinnell for the Camden Award, contains more compassion, diversity, and skill than the fifth book or the tenth book by most older poets. Ranging from free verse to formal structures but never straying far from an anchoring tetrameter or pentameter line, Hoey's subtle lyricism sounds most like the speech of the straightforward, wry upstate New York and New England folks he prefers to write about.

Two powerful dramatic monologues best represent his talent. In "Sunday Rock," a doctor recalls his rounds through the back country and specifically tells his half-believing listener about the old woman who mistook a tapeworm for Satan's deformed child. The leisurely pace of the doctor's narration comes to an abrupt halt. Chilled, one turns the page expecting the poem to continue, then turns back grateful it doesn't.

In "Listening for Bear," an old farmer living on after his wife's

[6] A FIRE IN THE COLD HOUSE OF BEING, by *Allen Hoey*. Walt Whitman Center. $6.95p.

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death in a remote region tells another skeptical listener about bear and coyote invisibly prowling a neighbor's field. His rambling discourse becomes an indictment of man's destruction of the wilderness (a recurrent theme in this book). "No, an animal / ain't likely to forget," he says, then touches on the Biblical story of Elisha and adds "When He gets mad / the Lord don't know a golden rule."

In both of these poems the listener is slow to believe what he is hearing, but what at first appears to be a conventional representation of East coast rural reticence gradually becomes a characteristic of an independent humility. In just a few poems ("Naming the Night," "The Vision") the poet's reserve takes promising material to an ambiguous, formulaic conclusion, but in most of this book the insights are clear and provocative. Hoey seems to know that at the core of the storyteller's gift is the ability to subordinate one's ego for the sake of hearing the stories of others. Not an easy thing to do, but the memorable story in poetry always begins there.

Alfred Corn's *The West Door*[7] suggests that he has never learned this. This is a book of workmanlike occasional poems. Best among these is "Nina at the Phoenix Park Zoo," in which the narrator observes a woman observing animals:

> "No platypus or lemurs? Nothing . . . bizarre?
> Well, then," she sighs and settles for a camel.
> If she hasn't looked my way, that's by design?
> (I'm standing near an ape named Zanzibar.
> The cage that counts is his. And hers. And mine.)

This is as serviceable and ingratiating as Corn's syntax and wit get; the concluding conceit—the world is a cage—represents the depth of his meditations. Though one of his favorite devices, the parenthetical comment, appears in the last two lines, the sonnet form restricts the aside, which in other poems runs on, becoming tedious.

This poem implies, and other looser poems confirm, that Corn very much needs the discipline of a strict form to keep his meandering, chatty tendencies in check. If, for example, the rhymed couplets of "A Little Lower Than the Angels" fit the small scene (a plane ride with a stranger), Corn's usual tendency is to over-describe settings and repeatedly interrupt narrative.

In most of the poems language is also a serious problem. Too much of it is obtuse and bloodless, creating the impression that the poet is a poor listener who writes with an open dictionary beside him. The reader must also contend with clichés ("the dawning insight," etc.) and misguided prepositions ("rebounds against into attentive skies"). The result is often confusing and sentimental. In "Trout and Mole," the mole's activity is described as a "swimlike

[7] THE WEST DOOR, by *Alfred Corn.* Viking. $17.95.

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starfirst musing forward, / a darkling process moved through heavy dark." What image does the first line conjure? And even if we allow for the mole's underground progress appearing to be "swimlike" (which is inaccurate), what do we make of "starfirst musing forward"? Do these words exist here only for the sake of sound, to fill out the line with abrupt trochees? Next, the mole "in his sighing night" is "deaf to the plight / of graminifers overhead, the dandelion clocks—" and here the narrator interrupts description to exclaim—"O blithe geodesic feather-domes, tropisms, cortex / after electric cortex . . ." The sentimental scene and forced language become harder and harder to buy.

The thirteen-page centerpiece poem, "An Xmas Murder," most fully reveals the author's shortcomings when he attempts more ambitious forms.

In West Newbury, Vermont, the narrator and a companion welcome a noonday visit by a doctor who is getting on in years, likes wine, and warily regards the community he lives in. "They're not as nice as you / Think they are. Live here a few more winters," he tells them. Then he regales his hosts with the story of Charlie Deudon, a Canuck farmer despised for his miserly success who fires an employee after an accident. On Christmas Eve friends of the dismissed worker get drunk, murder Deudon, and throw his body into the icy river. The men are arrested and acquitted after a sensational trial at which the doctor is a star witness. The night of the killing, the doctor explains, he was giving a lift to a Marine who had spent the previous night with him. As they drove past the Deudon farm, the doctor recognized one of the assailants.

This is promising material, but it is not the key element of the poem. The doctor's monologue is merely anecdotal, serving to set up the narrator's meditations on the brutality and narrow-mindedness of his neighbors. In numerous asides, the narrator interrupts the monologue to describe in laborious terms the doctor, the doctor's speech, and his own snap judgements concerning the doctor's story. One of the first interruptions explains the doctor's relationship to his hosts: "We knew each other, naturally, but not / On terms of friendship." The last four words of this quote are unnatural, for who would speak of someone in that way? Another interruption describes the doctor: "A wisp of a smile, half irony, half / Bereavement plays about his guileless face." The verb *plays* is a cliché, and *guileless* is inaccurate. How can a man who feels ironic and bereaved in a flash be without guile? Especially when we know that he is thinking of another's misfortune and has his own bitter ax to grind. Yet another interruption describes the effect the monologue is having on the listeners: "But his words / stay lodged in us like arrows, arrows aimed / As carefully as acupuncture and meant / Somehow to warn and counsel." This is just plain silly.

These examples, and many others, suggest that the narrator does

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not trust the subject enough, allowing its subtle and complicated implications to emerge naturally. They also suggest that the poet strains his language to fill out the blank verse, which he occasionally violates for no apparent reason.

The element of the monologue that obviously excites the narrator, besides the act of brutality, is the persecution suffered by the doctor both during and after the trial. The heavy-handed implication here is that the doctor is harassed not only for giving evidence against the defendants but because he is a homosexual. Unfortunately, the poet is content with stereotypes. The four drunken murderers become the entire community, which is anti-outsider, anti-homosexual. The community is bad. This is a simplistic treatment that wastes the potential power of the doctor's monologue and trivializes the legitimate struggle homosexuals often face in gaining acceptance to many communities.

"An Xmas Murder," when measured against other similarly structured poems—Dana Gioia's "The Room Upstairs," Louis Simpson's "The Psyche of Riverside Drive," and Allen Hoey's "Sunday Rock" come to mind—is found wanting. It fails, as do many other poems in this collection, because the poet will not allow the lives he's writing about to present themselves.

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HARRY GOLDGAR

Jung and the Freudians

THE FREUDIANS' RELENTLESS ATTACK on the intellectual respectability of Carl Gustav Jung's ideas and on his character has now continued for three quarters of a century, if we date it from Jung's historic letter to Freud of 6 January 1913, marking the end of their collaboration and friendship, with its famous conclusion, "*Der Rest ist Schweigen.*"

It is remarkable, yet characteristic of Jung and his adherents, that the Jungians have not troubled themselves to counterattack: they have, in general, simply ignored the slanders and gone about their business of healing the sick. Thus, as late as April 1957, when he is almost eighty-two, we find Jung graciously acknowledging: "Despite the blatant misjudgment I have suffered at Freud's hands, I cannot fail to recognize, even in the teeth of my resentment, his significance as a cultural critic and psychological pioneer. . . . [In illuminating dark areas of the mind] without Freud's 'psychoanalysis' I wouldn't have had a clue." In contrast, for the savage attitude of the Freudian camp, see Bruno Bettelheim, writing in the *New York Review of Books* in 1983 about Jung's love affair with a patient, Sabina Spielrein. Bettelheim apprises us of Jung's "betrayal" of Spielrein, his effort to "whitewash" his "scandalous" behavior, his "scoundrelly reaction," his "dishonesty"; though it has no relevance to his theme, he even dredges up the threadbare canard that Jung "embraced some of Hitler's ideas" (I shall return to this accusation). Then, taking the reductive view of Jung's "system" that obtains among Freudians, Bettelheim deduces that "all of the central Jungian concepts" originated in the Spielrein affair, that even in the break with Freud "what had originally been a personal need to deny the importance of sexuality [in *l'affaire* Spielrein] became a theoretical issue." Nevertheless, Bettelheim is compelled to admit that whatever outrage Jung committed upon la Spielrein *cured* her of a severe neurosis!

These reflections on the Freudians' war with Carl Jung, the "Crown Prince" who did a nasty Oedipal thing to the father, are prompted by a new biography of Jung by Gerhard Wehr, a German writer on psychological topics.[1] Without the slightest trace of hagi-

[1] JUNG: A Biography, by *Gerhard Wehr*. Trans. by *David M. Weeks*. Shambhala. $25.00.

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ography, Wehr manages to contribute importantly to the rehabilitation of Jung's reputation that has been in progress in recent years after the long Freudian interregnum. Increasingly, Freud's dogma seems to belong to the earlier decades of the century, when the *moeurs* of all the Western countries were near enough to those of late-Victorian Vienna for the assumptions predicated on them (the repressed sexual urge, the "family romance," woman as the hysteria-prone weaker sex, and so on) to be assimilated. Although later generations of Freudians have excised much, revised much, and added much, a certain nineteenth-century mustiness still clings to the fundamental assumptions of psychoanalysis.

Jung, on the other hand, is our *auteur* psychologist, developing, expanding, and modifying his ideas as the century moves toward the Age of Aquarius, psychotherapist of a time of transition, "interpreter of an age," Wehr writes, "diagnostician of a change in consciousness." Besides his frequent updating of his books and essays—"On the Psychology of the Unconscious," for example, was repeatedly revised under various titles between 1912 and 1942—Jung's dynamic, ongoing contemporaneity is reflected in his voluminous commentaries on the psychology of current events, from the catastrophe of World War I to the "modern myth" of flying saucers (1958). Freudian theory and practice seem, at least to the untutored observer, to remain static and hermetic; Jung is always living up to his name, always youthful, always talking about what is happening *in the world*, about the patient in the world. As psychotherapist he, and every Jungian practitioner after him, carries on a lively dialogue with the patient, instead of attempting to obliterate himself as the psychoanalyst does. This with-it faculty is surely one reason for his adoption by many as psychagogue or (sorry, but this word was bound to turn up sooner or later) guru.

But there are other reasons for Jung's charisma, for the sensation, when we read him, that he is speaking directly to us. I think, as Wehr thinks, that the appeal lies in the fundamental truth that Jung during his midlife "confrontation with the unconscious" hit upon: that

> the goal of psychic development is clearly the process of self-realization or individuation, in the course of which the great polarities or pairs of opposites in life are merged into a unity: the conscious and (at least partially) the unconscious, the light and the dark, and the masculine and the feminine, in the form of the soul-image which constitutes the inner femininity of the man (anima) and the inner masculinity of the woman (animus).

In Jung's definition, individuation means "coming to selfhood" or "becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, insofar as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it

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also implies becoming one's own self." It is the goal of the *nekyia*, the "night sea journey." Another term for this expedition into the inner depths is, of course, initiation; it was the origin of Jung's alchemical studies, and one learns from this book that even just now, in the 1980s, it has become the focus of a therapeutic method, a Jungian offshoot, called *Initiatischer Therapie*, invented by a certain Karlfried Graf Dürckheim.

Gerhard Wehr's book about Jung is adequate as to factual details, but I doubt that there are any facts in it that are new or that were not already reported in Barbara Hannah's thorough 1976 biography. Indeed, it is not "researched" at all in the usual sense, being based entirely on secondary sources, and *almost* entirely on two sources, Jung's own *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* and the published correspondence.

But the absence of new "facts," of even any claim to such discoveries, makes no difference, because this is not a conventional biography. It is a psychography. Its subject is Carl Jung's inner life, and his scientific ideas as they emerge from or relate to it. It is thus—and this is its curious and extraordinary interest—not only a book whose title is *Jung* but also a book written on Jungian principles. Jung's method of "amplification" (accumulating, in the case of every psychic experience of the analysand, related motifs from intellectual and religious history or mythology) is adapted by Wehr to biography, so that frequently, after narrating an event in Jung's life, he launches into full-blown psychological analysis. For instance, he declares that a childhood dream of Jung's "already suggests the physician and psychotherapist's mature work. . . . More precisely, this dream . . . is both a symbol of spiritual birth and an anticipatory image of the goal of the maturing human personality, and thus of what will be aimed for on the road to individuation." (This goes on for half-a-dozen pages.)

Stated another way: Jung wrote about, and Wehr echoes, the distinction between the individual's "No. 1 and No. 2 personalities." Immediately, the distinction is one between consciousness and the unconscious ("the hidden side of man's nature"); but by extension it is a distinction between everyday "outer" existence and the "inner" mental life which so often runs on a quite different track. This book, then, is primarily the story of "Jung No. 2."

However, on the factual side, Wehr does not neglect to explode certain myths about Jung that have been promulgated by his adversaries in order to discredit him. He takes us carefully through the abundant evidence that refutes the Freudian calumnies about Jung's "flirtation with the Nazis" and his "anti-Semitism." Wehr points out that anti-Semitic motives were imputed to Jung in the first place since "this same supposed apostate along with his colleagues in Zürich had once had to serve as an alibi for psychoanalysis' not being bound to the Judaism of its first spokesman." (Freud

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himself in those years was perfectly open about his satisfaction in having a branch office in Switzerland with a non-Jewish branch manager.) This "apostasy" was the root of the faithful's systematic defamation of Jung that persists even today—in the teeth of the renowned Jewish colleagues of the second generation who worked with him, people like Erich Neumann of Tel Aviv, Gerhard Adler of London, or Aniela Jaffé of the C.G. Jung Institute, amanuensis of his *Memories*.

When the Nazi Party came to power in Germany in 1933, Jung had just become president of the General Medical Society for Psychotherapy and editor of its *Zentralblatt*. By government edict, "non-Aryan" doctors were to be excluded from the society. Jung hit upon a clever dodge; he began by initiating

> the formation of an International Society and drafting its official constitution. . . . It would be formed of national groups, for example German, Swiss, Dutch, and Danish, but only the German section . . . could be subject to the requirements of coordination. For individuals who did not choose to be affiliated with any national section it was still possible to join the new International Society. In this way access to the common organization was still open to Jewish colleagues.

Jung became president of this "supranational" association. He had nothing to do with the Nazified German national group.

There's much more, but this much shows us Jung straining in the very beginning against Nazi pressures. He "consistently pursued this line through the unrest of the thirties," resigning as president only in 1939. The historical Jung is unrecognizable in the one-dimensional "embracer of some of Hitler's ideas" created by Bruno Bettelheim and his fellow-Freudians. If, like many other innocents, he had thought momentarily, early on, that Hitler's "revolution" "might have been the start of something great," he was quick to admit later to his Jewish friends, the Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem and the Berlin rabbi and Theresienstadt survivor Leo Baeck, "I slipped up."

In the later thirties, and during the war, Jung wrote frequently against Hitlerism, about the "Wotan archetype" and its transformation of the German people into a massive force for evil. By the middle of the war, he was reported to be on a Nazi blacklist, in case the German army were to invade Switzerland.

It is true that Jung, who was, like everyone, a product of a certain cultural moment, wrote and spoke about what he called "Jewish psychology" (i.e., the psychology of Jews, not a Jewish science of psychology). He also attempted to define the distinctive psychologies of American blacks, Orientals, and others. In this quaint but practically universal "racism" of the period he was not alone: in

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1908 we find Sigmund Freud writing to Karl Abraham: "Be tolerant, and do not forget that you actually have it easier than Jung in following my ideas, for . . . you come much closer to my intellectual constitution through being racially related, whereas he as a Christian and a pastor's son finds his way to me only against great resistances."

Wehr daintily explodes several other myths repeated so often by the Freudians that much of the public, alas!, has come to accept them. One, trotted out again by Bettelheim in his *New York Review* article, I have already touched upon: that Freud "expelled" Jung from the psychoanalytical movement. Wehr's account of Freud-Jung relations is a model of impartiality, but he hardly needs to do more than refer us to the published correspondence. Jung's disagreement with Freud about the centrality of the sexual motive dates from his first letter, 5 October 1906 (Sabina Spielrein, incidentally, came upon the scene in Zürich on 23 October): "It seems to me that though the genesis of hysteria is predominantly, it is not exclusively, sexual. I take the same view of your sexual theory." If this was the main bone of contention, there were others equally theoretical. The actual parting, with great regret *de part et d'autre*, came about by mutual consent. Freud writes on 3 January 1913, "I propose that we abandon our personal relations entirely"; Jung replies on 6 January: "I accede to your wish . . ., for I never thrust my friendship on anyone."

Wehr deals masterfully, too, with the myth that Jung was a "mystic," an "occultist," his methods "unscientific"; and that he wished to make a "religion" of his psychotherapy. "For Jung," Wehr shrewdly notes, ". . . it was precisely Freud's universally applied sexual theory that seemed 'occult,' an unproved hypothesis or a scientifically embellished dogma." For a time, Freud was enthusiastic about Jung's researches into mythology and the psychology of religion, explorations which never had any other motive than to enhance therapy; from them, Freud thought, Jung would "return home with a rich cargo." But then there was always the vexing question of "the nature of the libido, which Jung could no longer see as restricted to the sexual drive. For him libido was more and more a universal psychic or life energy. . . ." Emerging from this dispute, Jung became—not so much to Freud as to his epigones— a "mystic." Thus when, thirty-five years later, Jung writes about supposed sightings of UFOs as a product of the collective unconscious, the rumor is spread that he "believes" in UFOs.

Later, Jung's alchemical researches became the special object of the Freudians' derision. Like any schoolboy who has been taught that the alchemists were fanatics who fancied that they could turn lead into gold, and who knows nothing of its complicated symbolism, these scoffers have made no effort to understand alchemy or Jung's use of it in therapy. What they misunderstand "as a ludi-

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crous escapade in a marginal field," Wehr explains, "actually turned out to be a helpful insight for the everyday practice of the psychotherapist." That is because the true subject of alchemy is individuation: "Those who sought in earnest the *lapis philosophorum* . . ., striving to express it in chemical form, referred to a practice that presented in the imagery of material 'transmutation' what was primarily a path to spiritual and physical knowledge, a way of self-transformation."

Wehr's book is not an "answer to the Freudians," though I may have made it seem so. Despite some awkwardnesses of translation (and the peculiarity of citing titles and editions in the end-notes sometimes in German, sometimes in English), this biography does create a rounded portrait of the No. 2, and to a certain extent the No. 1, lives of a great healer. For after all the controversy and defamation have died down, if they ever do, let us remember that C. G. Jung was a full-time practicing psychiatrist, seeing patients, and in most cases restoring them to health, day in and day out for sixty years.

Demaris S. Wehr (no relation to Gerhard Wehr—the identity of names is pure synchronicity), has a different axe to grind.[2] She finds "unending conflict" between feminists and Jungian psychologists. She has discovered that Jung's psychology fosters women's "internalized oppression," that Jung himself was one of those phallocentric patriarchal sexists we hear so much about nowadays. Naturally, she has much to say about Jung's discussions of the anima archetype, but manages to misread so violently that she can conclude that their message is "that woman's identity is found in the service of a man."

Like Dr. Bettelheim, Ms. Wehr refers to Freud's "dismissal" of Jung, and indeed, although she claims sympathy with Jung, and reveals that she teaches a course in him, her book gives me the impression that she is a Freudian mole. If she insists upon being considered a Jungian, one can only recall Jung's cry at the inauguration of the C.G. Jung Institute: "I can only hope and wish that nobody will become a 'Jungian.' "

[2] JUNG AND FEMINISM: Liberating Archetypes, by *Demaris S. Wehr*. Beacon Press. $17.95.

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DIANE MIDDLEBROOK

The Life of a Good Old Girl

MOST OF US WHO WENT TO COLLEGE from the fifties to the mid-sixties were taught to read fiction by Caroline Gordon. *The House of Fiction* (1950), the anthology Gordon edited with her husband the poet Allen Tate, was widely adopted in college courses because of Gordon's trenchant commentaries, which brought to bear on "masterpieces" the techniques of formal analysis ("close reading") engendered in the then-lively school of New Criticism. Gordon, the author of nine novels and abundant short stories, did most of the work on this book, but it was Tate's name that sold it. Neither Tate's nor Gordon's literary reputation has survived the withering of New Criticism.

But perhaps Gordon is due for a revival. If so, Ann Waldron's biography of Caroline Gordon and her circle will greatly enrich the discussion.[1] Though everywhere infused with critical intelligence, this is not the generic "critical biography" of a literary figure. Waldron supplies plot summaries and keeps track of Gordon's book reviews, but she is after something more interesting than reviving a faded reputation: capturing the anomalous drives that formed Gordon as a female champion of patriarchy. Belligerently anti-feminist and a complacent racist, Gordon expressed, in cascades of outrageously witty, chatty letters, attitudes now more deeply suppressed in American culture than when she imbibed them; while Gordon's fiction projects some of the psychological conflicts induced by living out the career of a woman novelist surrounded by the lofty-minded traditionalists of the "Southern Renaissance." Ann Waldron's prose is an empathetic, resourceful narrative medium of exposition for all the maddening dimensions of this interesting subject.

Close Connections opens with a chapter on an exemplary summer. It is 1937, Caroline Gordon is forty-one years old; her house in Tennessee is full of estivating artists—Tate; Ford Madox Ford; his wife the painter Janice Biala and her sister Wally, who served as Ford's amanuensis; and Robert Lowell, who pitched a tent in the yard since all the bedrooms were occupied by invited visitors (Lowell invited himself). Waldron sees this as a high point in the lives of the Tates: "All the earmarks of their complicated personalities and

[1] CLOSE CONNECTIONS: Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance, by *Ann Waldron*. G.P. Putnam's Sons. $22.95.

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the elements of what they considered most important—hospitality, a commitment to literature and to young writers, good fun and good food, a classical kind of agrarianism, the knack for living on little money—stand out in brilliant relief. Their lives would never be dull, but they would never be quite so theatrical again."

Waldron suggests by this beginning that Caroline Gordon cannot be seen at all except as positioned by her connections to literary men and the women around them. Gordon's own beginnings as a writer in Tennessee receive little emphasis; at about age twenty-four she went to work for a newspaper and also began writing a novel "without encouragement." Then she met Allen Tate and succumbed "spellbound" to his intellectual brilliance. They both decided to move to New York, where Tate was immediately welcomed by the likes of Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, Hart Crane, Kenneth Burke, all of them "conscious of being men of letters, sharply aware that they were part of a new literary generation" promoting so-called "agrarian" values against the developing urbanity of American culture: an ideological milieu in which women were of small account. Gordon and Tate began to drift apart as Tate's New York connections strengthened. Then she became pregnant by him, and they wed.

From the outset of their married life, Gordon positioned herself at the center of a literary coterie by housing and feeding penniless, homeless, alienated talents. "Desperate for time to write," Gordon sent the new baby Nancy home to Kentucky with her own mother and moved to upstate New York into "half a house" they rented for eight dollars a month. They immediately invited Hart Crane—who was even poorer—to live with them.

Men ran the institutions to which Caroline Gordon was drawn by talent: publishing houses, literary journals, universities. But writers work at home. Once married to Tate, Gordon turned their various living quarters no matter how cramped into versions of the summer camp, the writer's conference, the think tank. Gordon was not too neurotic to make prodigious space for herself within the domestic role; she came from a long line of Southern country women used to taking charge. She could write all morning at the center of household bedlam, with typewriters tapping in every room; then cook, sew, garden, visit, hunt mushrooms, paint in oils, write letters, and edit other people's manuscripts for the rest of the day, and drink late into the night. She was preposterously hospitable; it was the way she survived as an artist.

Not *too* neurotic. Gordon "had two obsessions," Waldron claims: writing fiction and Allen Tate. "A relentlessly chaste wife—and a jealous one," Gordon blew apart at the seams when she discovered or suspected sexual infidelities. Her temper was quick to flare, and drinking shortened her fuse. Both Tates seem to have been alcoholics, drinking immoderately whenever they could afford it. (Friends

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reported that during Allen Tate's stint as consultant in American Letters at the Library of Congress, each party guest at the Tates' home would be served a bottle, not a glass, of Jack Daniel's sour mash whiskey.) Apparently, Tate attacked Gordon on two occasions with intent to kill. Gordon when aroused threw memorable "fits": screaming, smashing crockery, shredding bedsheets in her wrath. After twenty years of marriage, they divorced—then remarried. Thirteen years later Tate left Gordon again, to marry the poet Isabella Gardner; seven years after that, at age sixty-seven, he divorced Gardner and marred a young nurse who bore him three sons. Waldron's book closes down when Tate withdraws; one long chapter skims the twenty-one years of Gordon's very active life after Tate abandoned her. She died at eighty-six.

Throughout the Tates' long partnership, Gordon functioned as the executive, and often the chief breadwinner, managing the twenty-five different homes they occupied and writing, writing, writing. She "grew" novels the way she grew plants: settling into a new home she would at once scout the territory, getting the lay of the land, getting at once into local lore, taking cuttings. She was inspired only by memory, but fresh territory could always dampen her roots. She could even be happy in a city if permitted the loan of ground to cultivate; in Rome, following her conversion to Catholicism, she created a rose garden at the Convent of the Perpetual Rosary where she had befriended the gardener. Most difficult were necessary stints teaching Creative Writing in New York City—like living in a balloon, she said. Gordon would commute weekends to the primitive upstate country house of her good friend Sue Jenkins for doses of chlorophyll; in her New York apartment she tried out hydroponic gardening, specializing in nicotiana (all her family grew tobacco).

Tate's literary production was sporadic, Gordon's unremitting. What immunized her against attacks of writer's block so common in the lives around her? Among many factors Waldron chronicles, very important was a disposition for coping that was Gordon's legacy from her mother's line, the sturdy hardworking female Meriwethers who spoke of their extended family as "The Connection." The clannish Meriwethers provided Caroline Gordon intimate knowledge of the way of life idealized by writers of the Southern Renaissance. Meriwethers owned land in Kentucky from 1809 on, and Caroline's childhood was spent at their plantation house, Merry Mont, which had neither running water nor electricity: "Tobacco was raised as a cash crop and most of the food on the table grew on the place. Though there was little cash, there were plenty of servants." Gordon's favorite way of living reproduced these patterns, with hack writing as the cash crop and at least one black servant even in the hardest times. Discomfort stimulated her, and the comings and goings of a big "family" grounded her, just as garden-

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ing grounded her, and conversations with intellectual men. (Gordon said she never learned anything important that a man didn't teach her.)

Gordon held definite opinions about everything, opinions honed through incessant visiting both in person and in a vast correspondence. Though she had the advantage of an excellent education in Latin and Greek, Gordon's intellectual development was as unsystematic as that of most women in her day. That it occurred at all was probably due to that disposition for coping, for making frugal use of valuable household resources. There were always plenty of philosophers and critics in Gordon's household. However, the two major influences on Gordon's thought, after the influence of Tate's romantic agrarianism, were Jungian psychoanalysis and Roman Catholicism. Gordon became a Catholic at age fifty-two, shortly after the traumatic divorce and remarriage. Insoluble problems in the marriage sent Gordon to a charismatic Jungian analyst at age fifty-nine. Both conversions refreshed her daily life by revealing new patterns in old behaviors, and gave welcome impetus to her reading, to her friendships (she tried zealously to "save" her friends) and to her fiction. Just this ability to draw on dailiness for intellectual as well as emotional satisfaction seems to have been the key to Gordon's creative strength.

Ann Waldron's creative strength as biographer is to let Caroline Gordon's consciousness speak for itself through well-selected quotations from Gordon's plentiful letters. Gordon kept alive in the minds of friends and family a vision of herself and Tate that frequently owed more to her idealizing convictions—and to her gift for storytelling—than to perilous, sometimes humiliating, realities. Times have changed, especially in the South, since Gordon's convictions were widely shared. Particularly disturbing to read about are Gordon's benign contempt for the black women who worked for her, and her outraged reaction to members of the Northern press who came to Memphis to report the story when the first black sharecroppers were admitted to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in 1935. Of course the Agrarians espoused segregation. Waldron achieves her own critical distance from these views by allowing others to comment on them, or selecting with witty tact phrases from Gordon's letters that situate Gordon's Southern complacency in its contexts.

Less indirect is Waldron's handling of Gordon's deeply conservative notions of woman's place: "Man is supposed to lead, woman to follow." Just often enough—not very often—Waldron pulls back to characterize Gordon in terms Gordon would not have embraced. "The most avowed advocate of a patriarchal society, she . . . said many times that women lost their power when they gained the right to vote. . . . Everything in her life indicates that she was a strong, independent woman—who wanted to be something else. She kept

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her maiden name, worked all her life, was anything but a stay-at-home housewife. She acted like a feminist, talked like a Southern ninny."

Waldron, too, wants Gordon to be something else: someone not so much a Southern ninny, not so pathetically dependent on the estate of marriage, not so violent. To her great credit, she has found aesthetic and structural solutions to this inevitable problem of biographers, the desire to make our subjects more like ourselves.

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C. B. COX

Hugh Kenner's Island

HUGH KENNER'S BOOK[1] ABOUT TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENGLISH culture and literature is tendentious, ill-informed and very enjoyable to read. His arguments about the decline of England seem to me like an after-dinner monologue by a crotchety, old, famous author, full of sharp, illuminating criticisms of books and writers, colorful anecdotes, and complete lack of knowledge of what has happened in England since Mrs. Thatcher gained power in 1979.

The section of the book to which I object most strongly is that which deals with England since 1945. According to Kenner, after the dishonest 1930s, which he calls "a cartoon decade," the postwar news is "that save by factitious cooption by the sheer illusory power of lists like Faber's and Chatto's—there's no longer an English Literature." Talent has not been lacking, but there is no longer any center, so that no talk, however extensive, about any writer need cause you to mention another. Kenner admires Charles Tomlinson and Basil Bunting, and devotes his last chapter to a good critical analysis of their poetry, but he believes their failure for many years to attract the attention and praise of the *T.L.S.* or the London literary circles is symptomatic of present-day English philistinism and stagnation. The island is sinking fast.

Kenner is right to draw attention to the decline of London as a literary center. He says that it is still the center of opinion, and the difference does create strains: "The Hack's Progress, or, How to Make It in London with Poetry, is a ready scenario for pointed gossip." The most important writers live in the provinces or abroad. Quite a number, such as Donald Davie, have emigrated to the United States.

It is also true that some parts of London have turned violent, with attacks on passengers late at night on the tubes, and drunken brawls after football matches. These are major inner city problems, particularly where people are crammed into jerry-built, high-rise flats. But Kenner cannot resist anecdote. On a recent visit he saw two City men "bowlers and weskits and all," being borne upwards on a steel tube station escalator. The one above, turned round to face the one below, was banging him about the head fiercely with an attaché case. I travel on London tubes almost every week and I have never seen any City gentlemen behaving in this way. I regular-

[1]A SINKING ISLAND: The Modern English Writers, by *Hugh Kenner*. Alfred A. Knopf. $22.95.

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ly walk about the center of London unmolested. Kenner wants to prove that order is breaking down in every section of society, but he prefers tittle-tattle to real evidence.

Kenner is also out-of-date. He describes a Trafalgar Square Post Office where the handset from each of twenty public telephones had been neatly snipped off and jettisoned. This ancedote reflects the 1970s, when England was often called the sick man of Europe. Since privatization British Telecom has achieved much in overcoming the vandalism of telephones. Statistics in May 1988, showed over 90% of public call-boxes in working order compared with 75% a year earlier. And Mrs. Thatcher's defeat of the Trade Unions and the success of her economic policies have changed attitudes radically. The huge London dockland development, for example, reflects a new realism, an entrepreneurial verve.

But the main charge against Kenner is that he willfully ignores most English literature since 1945. The two most important English novelists post-1945 are William Golding, who won the Nobel Prize in 1983, and Graham Greene, who ought to have been awarded the Nobel Prize long ago. Kenner never even mentions Golding. After the early success of *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and *Pincher Martin* (1956), Golding's achievement sagged, but his reputation was restored by the remarkable *Rites of Passage* (1980), in which he recreates the way of life on an ancient ship of the line journeying from England to Australia in the early nineteenth century. The sequel, *Close Quarters* (1987) is to be followed by a third and final volume. Golding's creative energies have not been sinking into decline.

There are only two references to Graham Greene. One sentence mentions that he was influenced by Ford Madox Ford. On another page Kenner says that by Hitler's time "mass taste had come to agree with Graham Greene that espionage was grubby." There is nothing about *The Quiet American* (1955), *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961), and *The Honorary Consul* (1973), or indeed any of the novels. The last sentence of Kenner's book reads: "Underneath, a deep doubt runs: has anything made any sense, Everyman will ask, since the time of Conrad and Wells, and the rattling good stories?" Greene, of course is a great storyteller, and it is extraordinary that Kenner should ignore him.

Kenner writes entertainingly about Conrad and Wells, but he confines his attention post-1945 to poetry. There is no reason given for this, and once again the omissions and misinterpretations are legion. Thom Gunn is not mentioned. Ted Hughes surpasses Graham Greene in being granted three references, but there is no discussion of his work. I admire Tomlinson and Bunting, but their achievement never rivals the originality of Hughes. In recent years, and particularly since he became Poet Laureate in 1984, Hughes's verse has turned slack and diffuse, but this should not warp our judgment of his earlier successes.

In the Autumn 1987 issue of *The Hudson Review*, Herbert Lomas

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called Hughes "a major poet," whose "genuine popularity in England is based on his almost hallucinatory imagination, his enhanced and enhancing exact observation, his organ-voice, not always completely under control, like his subjectivity, and his resourceful, textured, hyperbolic verbal gift." Lomas points out that Hughes is closer to Lowell, Berryman, Sexton and Plath, to Dickinson, Ransom and Moore, than to his British contemporaries. How can Hugh Kenner's thesis about the decline of English poetry be taken seriously when he never even mentions Hughes's achievements in books such as *Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960)?

Kenner devotes several pages to Philip Larkin, whose lack of popularity in the United States remains a cultural phenomenon worthy of study. Kenner repeats the usual criticisms of Larkin's dreariness, his famous plain-guy platitudes about the unreadability of Ezra Pound or James Joyce. Much of what Kenner says repeats M. L. Rosenthal in *The New Poets* (1967), who found that "a fundamental lugubriousness marks, and mars, much of Larkin's writing." Kenner tells us: "In Philip Larkin we behold perhaps the first British man of letters of notable gifts for whom easy books, and only easy books were the human mind's natural secretions." Since Larkin died in 1985, there has been growing recognition, particularly in essays by Barbara Everett, that he was deeply influenced by past literature. His pose of ignorance, which Kenner emphasizes, was some kind of defense mechanism, and, as everyone knows, he was converted away from imitation of Yeats by reading the poetry of Thomas Hardy. I saw him at Hull University almost every working day for ten years, and found him constantly alert to new developments in English verse. My wife and I once arrived slightly early at his flat for a supper engagement. He was reading Wordsworth, and asked for my views on a line in *The Excursion* which he found obscure. I was given a brief glimpse of how he really spent his time when alone. He was a master craftsman, and over lunch in the staff refectory would repeatedly enlist our aid in his search for rhymes.

The conflict in Larkin is between "a hunger in himself to be more serious" (a quotation from his poem "Church Going") and a tendency to treat life as farcically absurd. The carefully formed stanzas and diction seem poised over an abyss, what in "Ambulances" he calls "the solving emptiness that lies just under all we do." This poised vulnerability makes his poems by no means so cut off from the great moderns as Kenner would have us believe. Larkin's images startle by their perplexing simplicities of diction. In "High Windows" the narrator is glad that we have escaped from repressions, when people were frightened by priests or sexual conventions. Now the young enjoy that paradise of promiscuity everyone has dreamed of all their lives. The poem concludes:

> And immediately
> Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:

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The sun-comprehending glass.
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

The poem takes off buoyantly from the constrictions of space and time on a journey through space. But the new-found freedom of perspective, the deep blue air, shows "Nothing." The typical simple last line suggests that escape from the world of historical contingency is inevitably a movement towards annihilation. Such images occur frequently in his best poems, in "An Arundel Tomb," "Dockery and Son" or "The Whitsun Weddings," for example, together with a lyricism and compassion which Kenner fails to notice.

Kenner limits his final chapter to "bards and bard-watchers," and does not realize that today English creative energy is expressed mainly through the theatre, film and television. The most important poet to have emerged in England since 1980 is Tony Harrison, whom Kenner does not mention. Tony Harrison became famous as a brilliant theatrical translator with bold versions of the classics, Molière's *The Misanthrope* (1973), Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* (1981) and *The Mysteries* (1985), an adaptation of the English mystery plays. These have been outstandingly successful at the National Theatre in London. The music for *The Oresteia* was composed by Harrison Birtwistle, whose innovations in English music are probably also unknown to Kenner.

In 1981 Harrison published *Continuous*, a sonnet sequence of great sadness about the lives of his working-class father and mother, who could not understand his "smutty" poems, and from whom he felt separated by his grammar school education. During this last year he has twice read his new long poem, "*V*," to an audience of millions on television. In this poem he describes the graveyard at Leeds where his parents are buried. The graveyard, which lies in the path of football supporters on their way home, has been vandalized by graffitti. In the poem Harrison talks with his alter ego, the skinhead he might have become if he had stayed in Leeds and not attended grammar school. The skinhead uses obscene four-letter words, and the poem's television reading provoked protests from Mrs. Grundy. Harrison expresses rage at the social divisions, the damaging effects of youth unemployment, created by Mrs. Thatcher's economic revolution.

And "telly," which Kenner dismisses in one word, in England has become an art form of amazing variety, in spite of the hackneyed soap operas and game shows. There are well-known set pieces, such as the Granada productions of "Brideshead Revisited" and "The Jewel in the Crown." But the most extraordinary television event in 1987 was Dennis Potter's "The Singing Detective." Like Hughes's *Crow*, this had been influenced by *The Waste Land*. "The Singing Detective" combines four stories in one, moving rapidly and disturb-

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ingly between them. Philip Marlow, a writer of pulp fiction, lies in hospital with his skin red and flaking from psoriasis, often a psychosomatic illness. He recalls the events, which provoked his neurotic disgust for women and sex. As a boy hidden in the branches of a tree, he watched his mother committing adultery—"shagging," as he calls it. These scenes are interwoven with material from Marlow's novel, *The Singing Detective*, which reflects his fantasies about his divorced wife who, like his mother, betrayed him.

In one sequence an old man arrives in the hospital ward after a stroke which has rendered him speechless, his head perpetually shaking. A group of evangelical Christians sing hymns to the patients with wild fervor. A young woman bends over the old man to tell him Jesus loves him. The camera moves close to the old man's speechless mouth, and we can tell from the movement of his lips that he is trying to tell her to "f," "f," "f." Dennis Potter is an angry moralist denouncing the world with a venom that recalls Swift. Television has broken the barriers that confined works of experimental literature to a limited audience. In England, millions watched and argued about "The Singing Detective."

Kenner's opinions about pre-1945 English literature are similarly prejudiced, though often very sharp and provocative. He dislikes Auden, and says that he "lived without embarrassment in the space where undergraduate callowness merges with unschooled self-esteem, and whoever else lived there he could dazzle with syntactic agility while violating no trust in shared attitudes." Kenner finds the same kind of presumption in Virginia Woolf, whose only readable novel, he says, is *To the Lighthouse*.

He raises many vital questions, and it is sad that this lively book should be so eccentric and so full of omissions. His thesis is that at the start of the twentieth century the English reading public divided into three groups. There were the semi-educated readers of *Tit-Bits*, with its snippets of information and short sensational stories. There were those who bought classics from Everyman's Library, which began with fifty volumes in 1906, and which created a kind of earnest, conservative audience; and there was a third public which read *The Yellow Book*, welcomed experimental art and by 1921 had become "hopelessly fragmented." None of these groups created a true readership for the best of modern writing, for Pound or Eliot or Joyce.

The nature of the reading public deserves careful scrutiny, but Kenner is continually reduced to conjecture and wild surmise. He tells us that the English think that they are literary, but they are "technologists." Are Graham Greene, Virginia Woolf or Ted Hughes technologists? What on earth does this mean? After this mishmash of a book, I suggest that Kenner needs an extended sabbatical to study the real English literature and culture of 1988.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Who says Goethe isn't alive and well in the United States? And not just in the circles that read the literary reviews. Two years ago the Goethe Institute in Boston received a communication from Senator Bob Dole that began: "Dear Goethe: I'm delighted to be able to inform you that at the last meeting of the Republican Senatorial Inner Circle, I personally placed your name in nomination." When Goethe failed to respond, he received a follow-up letter including a note from President Reagan and the prospect of a reception hosted by Vice President Bush. The Republican boosters got it right about Goethe's political orientation: as a senior official in the grand duchy of Saxe-Weimar he did indeed become increasingly conservative in his views.

—Theodore Ziolkowski, "Goethe in English," p. 499.

Horton Hamilton climbed out of the patrol car, one hand on his hip. The thick fingers unsnapped the leather band that held the pistol safe in the holster. Willy's father said, "Don't you be gettin' any ideas of makin' like a jackrabbit, boy; I got a gun." He padded towards the skittery, long-legged kid, talking all the time, using the low rumble of his voice to hold the boy in one place, like a farmer trying to mesmerize a dog that's gone mad so he can put a bullet through its head.

—Melanie Rae Thon, "Iona Moon," p. 433.

I have heard various theories as to why *Macbeth* is unlucky, the most charming of which is the notion that the witches' chants are actual incantations for calling up the Devil, who arrives to work mischief on the cast. It is certainly true that there have been many deaths, injuries, and other mishaps during productions of the play; the most recent involved the suicide of a singing coach, who jumped off the balcony at the Met during a performance of Verdi's operatic version. But I suspect that the real reason for the play's reputation is that it is just plain difficult to perform.

—Richard Hornby, "New Life on Broadway," p. 512

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